

Witness Name: CATHRYN ELLSMORE

Exhibits: [CE/01-CE/80]

Dated: 25/09/2025

## THE SOUTHPORT INQUIRY

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### FIRST WITNESS STATEMENT OF CATHRYN ELLSMORE

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I, Cathryn Ellsmore, Director of Prevent in the Homeland Security Group (HSG) in the Home Office, will say as follows: -

1. I am Director of Prevent in HSG, a post I have held since 1 April 2025. Prior to that, I was Deputy Director of the Prevent Delivery Unit, HSG, from 24 June 2019. I have worked in counter-terrorism within the Home Office since 2013, including as Head of Prepare in the Office for Security and Counter Terrorism (OSCT) (now HSG) and as Head of International Counter-Terrorism in OSCT. My work has included establishing, in 2017, the cross-government Victims of Terrorism Unit to support victims of terrorist attacks and their families.
2. This witness statement is made to assist the Southport Inquiry (“the Inquiry”) with the matters set out in a Rule 9 Request dated 14 August 2025.
3. I make this statement from information and documents within my personal knowledge; information provided to me by colleagues within the Home Office; and my own experience of the functions and operations of the Home Office. My own role and experience is in counter-terrorism and so content concerning Prevent, and the wider counter-terrorism strategy is largely within my own knowledge. For detail concerning other policy areas, in particular knives and offensive weapons, biological and explosive weapons and online harms, I am more reliant on content provided to me by colleagues working in the relevant policy teams.
4. I would like to express my deepest condolences on behalf of the Home Office and personally to the families of Bebe King, Elsie Dot Stancombe, and Alice da Silva Aguiar and to all the children and adults so terribly harmed, physically and psychologically, in the attack, and their families.

## **INTRODUCTION**

5. The Home Office provides this statement to assist the Southport Inquiry with its Phase 1 investigations. On 29 July 2024, the perpetrator (to whom I will refer as “AR”) committed a shockingly violent and devastating attack, targeting children.

6. A few years prior to the attack, AR was referred to Prevent, which – as this statement will cover in more detail - is part of the UK Government's Counter Terrorism Strategy [**CE/01 - HOM000065 (CONTEST 2023)**]. AR was referred 3 times: on 5 December 2019, 1 February 2021 and 26 April 2021. Each of the Prevent referrals was closed after the initial assessment of the referral by Counter-Terrorism Policing (CTP), which is operationally responsible for the delivery of Prevent. AR was not referred onwards to Channel, the specific multi-agency programme within Prevent that provides tailored support to individuals identified as being at risk of radicalisation.
7. AR conducted the attack using a knife he had purchased online. When his home was searched after the attack, further weapons and ricin, a highly toxic poison which AR had produced, were found. When AR's devices were searched, he was found to be in possession of terrorist material, and to have viewed and bookmarked a significant volume of violent material. Whilst the attack was not assessed to have been carried out for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause and therefore not classified as a terrorist attack [**CE/02 - HOM000103 (Sentencing Remarks of Goose J) (at paragraph 26)**], there is evidence that AR was an individual fascinated by acts of extreme violence and mass casualty attacks from a young age.
8. Individuals with this presentation are capable of committing attacks as devastating in outcome as attacks committed by ideologically driven perpetrators, but identifying and managing the risk they pose raises different and complex challenges. I understand that central to the Inquiry's work in Phase 1 will be understanding if there were opportunities to identify, manage and mitigate the risk posed by AR in the years prior to the attack, having regard to the policies and structures that were in place at that time for dealing with individuals with his presentation. Phase 2 will look at the adequacy of those systems.
9. By this statement, I have sought to:
  - (a) Set out the policy context for the actions and decisions taken in respect of AR, following the referrals to Prevent, the work that has been done to strengthen Prevent since AR's referrals and to explain wider work underway to reduce the risk from individuals such as AR (although this will be dealt with in more detail in Phase 2).
  - (b) Explain the proposed operation of the Youth Diversion Orders, a new counter-terrorism disruption tool.
  - (c) Summarise MI5's involvement with AR.

- (d) Explain legislative and other policies on the purchases and sales of knives and offensive weapons, and measures taken or in train to tackle knife crime.
- (e) Explain biological and explosive weapons policy and online harms.
- (f) Explain the Home Office's role in tackling online harms, the key provisions of the Online Safety Act 2023 and the mechanisms whereby social media accounts can be accessed following an attack.

## **OVERVIEW OF COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY (CONTEST)**

10. Section 1 of the Terrorism Act (TACT) 2000 defines terrorism as 'the use or threat of action' that is 'designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public' and is 'for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause'.<sup>1</sup> The specific actions included are serious violence against a person, serious damage to property, endangering a person's life (other than that of the person committing the action), creating a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public, and action designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system.
11. The Home Office is responsible for the UK Government's counter-terrorism strategy (CONTEST) [**CE/01 - HOM000065 (CONTEST 2023); CE/03 - HOM000064 (CONTEST 2018)**]. CONTEST was first developed in 2003 in response to the 9/11 attacks. The first iteration of CONTEST was published in 2006, and further reviews were published in March 2009, July 2011, June 2018 and July 2023. CONTEST aims to reduce the risk to the UK, its citizens and interests overseas, from terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence. There are four core strands to the strategy:
- **Prevent** (aim: to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism);
  - **Pursue** (aim: to stop terrorist attacks happening in this country or against UK interests overseas);
  - **Protect** (aim: to strengthen the UK's protection against a terrorist attack);
  - **Prepare** (aim: to minimise the impact of an attack).

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<sup>1</sup> TACT 2000, s.1(1).

12. The purpose of Prevent and Pursue is to reduce the threats we face from terrorism; the purpose of Protect and Prepare is to reduce our vulnerabilities to terrorism. The strands cannot be viewed in isolation and our response to terrorism requires activity in all four areas (together with the broader national security framework, which includes not only security at home but strength abroad and sovereign capabilities, that is, vital national competencies, supply chains and technologies).
13. The National Security Council (NSC), chaired by the Prime Minister, oversees CONTEST. The Home Secretary is responsible for the overall coordination of the counter-terrorism response, has oversight of MI5 and is accountable for the activities of the police service in England and Wales, including CTP. Other Secretaries of State also have responsibilities under CONTEST.

## **PREVENT**

### **Prevent Strategic Objectives**

14. The Prevent strategy (as it was originally known) was first published in 2005, following the 7/7 terrorist attacks in London. The 2005 Prevent strategy is set out in detail in exhibit **[CE/04 – HOM000124 (Countering International Terrorism The United Kingdom's Strategy July 2006)]**.
15. At the time of AR's referrals to Prevent, between 2019 and 2021, the Prevent strategic objectives (as set out in CONTEST 2018) were to:
- (a) Tackle the causes of radicalisation and respond to the ideological challenge of terrorism;
  - (b) Safeguard and support those most at risk of radicalisation through early intervention, identifying them and offering support;
  - (c) Enable those who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate **[CE/03 - HOM000064 (CONTEST 2018) (at paragraph 32)]**.
16. Following the Independent Review of Prevent conducted by Sir William Shawcross and published in February 2023, the Prevent strategic objectives were amended in CONTEST 2023. This was to increase focus on tackling the ideologies that underpin terrorism, rather

than addressing broader vulnerabilities. The Prevent strategic objectives, which applied at the time of the attack, and to this day are:

- (a) Tackling the ideological causes of terrorism;
- (b) Intervening early to support people susceptible to radicalisation;
- (c) Enabling people who have already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate [CE/01 - HOM000065 (CONTEST 2023) (page 30)].

### **The Prevent Duty and Channel**

17. The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA 2015) introduced the statutory Prevent Duty. Pursuant to section 26(2) of the CTSA 2015<sup>2</sup> 'specified authorities' (local authorities, schools, colleges, universities, health bodies, prisons and probation, youth justice, and the police<sup>3</sup>) are under a duty to have '*due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism*' in the exercise of their functions,<sup>4</sup> and pursuant to s.29 of the same Act, to have regard to the statutory guidance.<sup>5</sup>
18. Both the July 2015 Prevent Duty Guidance [CE/05 - HOM000023] (that was in place when AR was referred to Prevent between 2019 and 2021) and the Prevent Duty Guidance 2023 [CE/06 - HOM000014], aim to ensure that, together with appropriate training, staff within specified authorities are aware of concerns related to radicalisation, can identify the signs of radicalisation, and know how to respond, including by making a referral to Prevent (as addressed further below).
19. Section 36(1) of the CTSA 2015<sup>6</sup> also introduced a statutory duty on local authorities to have a panel of persons in place for its area to assess the extent to which any individual referred to a panel by the police or a local authority is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism, and to offer and provide tailored support to identified individuals. These are known as "Channel panels". Panels and partners to panels are required to have regard to the Channel Duty Guidance (which was first issued in 2015 [CE/07 - HOM000039], and reissued in 2020 [CE/08 - HOM000020] and 2023 [CE/09 - HOM000021] in exercising their functions.<sup>7</sup> Channel is a multi-agency programme which focuses on providing

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<sup>2</sup> Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (CTSA 2015), s 26.

<sup>3</sup> CTSA 2015, sch 6.

<sup>4</sup> CTSA 2015, s 26(1).

<sup>5</sup> CTSA 2015, s 29(2).

<sup>6</sup> CTSA 2015, s 36.

<sup>7</sup> CTSA 2015, s 36(7).

support at an early stage to people identified as being 'at risk of radicalisation, supporting terrorism or committing terrorist acts' [CE/09 - HOM000021 (at paragraph 22)] (although in 2015 the wording was 'as being vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism' [CE/07 - HOM000039 (Channel Duty Guidance 2015) (at paragraph 14); CE/08 - HOM000020 (Channel Duty Guidance 2020) (at paragraph 13)]). Channel uses a multi-agency approach to: (i) identify people at risk; (ii) assess the nature and extent of that risk; and (iii) develop the most appropriate support plan for the person concerned [CE/07 - HOM000039; CE/08 - HOM000020; CE/09 - HOM000021 (Channel Duty Guidance 2015, 2020 and 2023)]. Further detail on Channel panels, those who sit on these panels and on their role, is set out below. AR was never referred to a Channel panel.

### **Role of Home Office in Prevent**

20. The Home Office has strategic responsibility for both the policy and the overall delivery of Prevent, but it is a cross-government capability with other government departments (i.e. the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)), the Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), local authorities and CTP, working in partnership to tackle radicalisation and deliver the programme's objectives.
21. The Home Office does not have operational responsibility for individual case management of Prevent referrals (such as AR's). Prevent is a system operationally led by CTP. CTP is a collaboration of UK police forces working with the UK intelligence community to help protect the public and national security by preventing, deterring, and investigating terrorist activity. CTP is a key statutory partner to Prevent and is responsible for the processing and assessment of referrals received. CTP is responsible for managing the CT risk for all Prevent referrals and Channel cases, while the safeguarding risk is the responsibility of the local authority.
22. The Home Office is responsible for the policy, oversight and overall delivery of the Prevent programme. The responsibilities of the Prevent Directorate include the following:
  - (a) **Guidance.** Developing and updating statutory guidance for specified authorities, including development of the Prevent Duty Guidance. CTP sets guidance and training for police, including issuing the Counter-Terrorism Case Officer Guide and guidance on the Dynamic Investigation Framework (DIF). CTP are responsible for ensuring their staff are aware of CTP guidance.

- (b) **Sector support.** Supporting statutory sectors (i.e. specified authorities – see paragraph 25(a) below) subject to the Duty to deliver Prevent and coordinating across Government. The team also works with non-statutory sectors, including the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Work and Pensions, and Immigration to deliver Prevent in their sectors by advising on Prevent policy, practice and training.
- (c) **Training.** Building in-house, sustainable, training capabilities for the health, education, and local authority sectors that are subject to the Duty. These training products (e-learning and face-to-face workshops) inform statutory sectors of the changing counter-terrorism landscape and ensure those delivering Prevent possess the skills and knowledge needed to understand and identify the drivers of radicalisation and manage the risk. CTP is responsible for the training of its officers.
- (d) **Local delivery.** The Local Delivery and Communities team is responsible for supporting local authorities to understand and mitigate terrorism risk. A network of Home Office Prevent regional advisers work with local authorities to help them achieve this. The advisers work across England, Wales, and Scotland to drive up Prevent delivery standards and assess compliance with the Duty. The team also works alongside CTP, DfE, and DHSC to improve Prevent delivery at a regional and local level.
- (e) **Channel policy.** The Channel policy team is responsible for the delivery of policy relating to Channel, developing new policy in response to emerging and challenging issues, updating the Channel Duty Guidance, project managing with CTP the Prevent Case Management Tracker (discussed below), and improving the quality and consistency of Channel delivery across the country through a professionalisation programme. The team works closely with CTP, local authorities and the Counter-Terrorism - Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre (CT-ARC).<sup>8</sup>
- (f) **Channel assurance.** Oversight and quality assurance of Channel panels (over 200) operating across England, Wales and Scotland to ensure consistency and adherence to national guidance.

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<sup>8</sup> CT-ARC is a national HMPPS body falling under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice, which was set up in 2019 and has been operational since November 2022. It addresses the evolving nature of terrorist threats through evidence-informed risk management. Using specialist psychologists and probation officers, it develops tools for assessing and intervening with individuals throughout the justice process. The team includes a research function that oversees product development and implementation, and a quality assurance function that monitors operational delivery.

- (g) **Learning.** Supporting case reviews, inquests and inquiries, and ensuring the integration of appropriate learning into policy.
- (h) **Project work.** Managing and providing funding to a network of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) that deliver targeted Prevent project work across England, Wales and Scotland.
- (i) **Desist and disengagement policy.** Policy development on the Desistance and Disengagement Programme, the purpose of which is to help rehabilitate and reduce the risk of individuals who have been involved in terrorism or terrorism related activity.
- (j) **Interventions.** The Interventions team aims to ensure the high-quality provision of intervention services across Prevent, the continuous improvement of the interventions provided, and the quality and professionalism of the intervention provider cohort.
- (k) **Online material.** Working with technology companies to remove swiftly, content that is unlawful in the UK. The Home Office works to influence industry partners to increase action to tackle online content used to radicalise, recruit and incite terrorism by providing threat assessment, insight and support. Collaboration with international partners, both bilaterally and through multilateral fora, also supports this work and allows alignment on policies where possible.
- (l) **Research.** Analysis on terrorist use of propaganda and exploitation of the internet to inform the UK's counter-terrorism system. Open-source monitoring to better understand the online information environment as it relates to terrorism and extremism.
- (m) **Statistical evaluation.** Research and evaluation of the Prevent programme and publication of annual statistics on individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent programme (for example, see [CE/10a – HOM000166 (Prevent referral data 2018-2019)]).

### The Prevent delivery model

23. CONTEST 2018 contained the Prevent delivery model which sets out how Prevent is designed to work i.e. by: (i) tackling the causes of radicalisation; (ii) intervening early to safeguard and support those who are most at risk to radicalisation; (iii) rehabilitating those who have already engaged with terrorism [CE/03 - HOM000064 (at page 32)].

24. The 2023 Prevent Duty Guidance updated the Prevent delivery model to bring it in line with the revised strategic objectives. The updated delivery model set out how Prevent aims to (i) tackle the ideological causes of terrorism, (ii) intervene early to support those who are most susceptible to radicalisation, and (iii) rehabilitate those who have already engaged with terrorism. The 2023 Prevent Duty Guidance explains [CE/06 - HOM000014 (at paragraphs 19-21)] that:

19. To tackle the ideological causes of terrorism, Prevent focuses on reducing the influence of radicalisers on susceptible audiences, as well as reducing the availability of, and access to, terrorist content online. Our work to counter radicalisation and reduce permissive environments extends across academia, civil society, communities, government and industry. Prevent takes a partnership approach to disrupting radicalisers, including those who sow division and hatred, by working with local, regional and national partners, law enforcement agencies, and other government partners.

20. Prevent intervenes early by identifying people who are susceptible to radicalisation and providing support to those suitable for intervention. Where the police assess a radicalisation risk following a Prevent referral, a Channel panel will meet to discuss the referral, assess the risk and decide whether the person should be accepted into Channel. Once accepted, the panel agree a tailored package of support to be offered to the person. The panel is chaired by the local authority and attended by multiagency partners such as CTP, education professionals, health services, housing and social services. Channel is a voluntary process, and people must give their consent before they receive support. In cases where the person is under 18 years of age, consent is provided by a parent, guardian or the agency that has responsibility for their care. Where risks cannot be managed in Channel, they will be kept under review by the police.

21. Rehabilitation seeks to reduce the risk of people who have been involved in terrorist related activity, including those who have been convicted of offences. The Desistance and Disengagement Programme provides specialist Home Office approved intervention providers to give support in the form of theological, ideological and practical mentoring to reduce the offending risk.

## **Delivery of the Prevent Duty**

### *Multi-agency delivery of the Prevent programme*

25. A network of partners is involved in the multi-agency delivery of Prevent:

- (a) Statutory partners: statutory partners (see paragraph 17 above) who are subject to the Prevent Duty are all central to the delivery of Prevent. Some central government departments, including DfE, HMPPS and DHSC produce their own departmental guidance to supplement the Prevent Duty Guidance and Home Office training and support.
- (b) Local authorities: with their wide-ranging responsibilities and democratic accountability to their electorate, local authorities are vital to Prevent work. They oversee delivery of the programme locally, collaborating with partners to understand and respond to local risks. Further, as a specified authority, all local authorities are obliged to implement the Prevent Duty effectively. In the few areas where the threat from radicalisation is highest, the Home Office provides funding to enable the local authority to fund dedicated Prevent teams. An annual prioritisation exercise to review the relative threat from terrorism across the country determines where in the country the threat from radicalisation is highest.
- (c) Civil Society Organisations: the Home Office provides funding to a wide range of organisations across England and Wales to deliver projects such as critical thinking workshops, mentoring, the use of sport as an intervention, and online safety training for parents. The purpose of these projects is to empower and build resilience in communities enabling them to challenge extremism and terrorism wherever it tries to take root.
- (d) CTP Units: as I address in detail below, where a referral is made due to concerns that a person is susceptible to radicalisation, this is received, triaged and progressed by CTP, following the pathway shown at Annex A. Prevent referrals are not made to and are not seen by the Home Office (except in bulk for the purposes of producing anonymised gov.uk statistics).
- (e) Channel panels: if a Prevent referral progresses and it is assessed that there is a risk of radicalisation, the case is considered by a multi-agency Channel panel of professionals (as set out above and covered in more detail below).

### *Referring an individual to Prevent*

26. Anyone who is concerned that someone is at risk of radicalisation can make a referral to Prevent. Public bodies under the Duty can make a referral to the police using the National Prevent Referral Form [**CE/11 – HOM000088 (National Prevent referral form introduced in September 2023)**] or by any other means (use of the form is strongly encouraged but not mandated). Referrals are received and assessed by CTP. The policy intention is that referring a person and - if they are identified at risk of radicalisation following an assessment by the police - referring them to Channel, should ensure that they receive the help they need to reduce their radicalisation risk. The support that can be offered through Prevent is detailed below.
27. Before making a referral, an individual might choose to seek advice from a safeguarding professional or local authority contact. It is important that the full context of an individual's behaviour is considered where a radicalisation concern is identified. For those who are subject to the Prevent Duty, sharing information and seeking advice from a departmental safeguarding lead or equivalent is helpful in exploring the reasons behind a concern, whether more information is needed, and whether a Prevent referral is appropriate or if other support should be provided. Guidance on making referrals is set out in Home Office training available on GOV.UK [**CE/12 – HOM000109 (HMG's Prevent webpage: Prevent Duty training)**]. More broadly, friends, family or community members who are concerned about someone being radicalised can turn to government-endorsed resources online that provide clear advice on how and when referrals should be made [**CE/13 - HOM000107 (CTP's ACT early website); CE/13a – HOM000140 (Home Office information sheet: Get help for radicalisation concerns)**].

### *Assessment of Prevent Referrals*

28. CTP are operationally independent from the Home Office and are responsible for developing their own policies and processes to support the assessment of Prevent referrals. The only exceptions to this arise in the context of the development of some of the referral assessment tools used operationally by Prevent. I will address each tool in detail below, but in overview, the Home Office had no input into the DIF [**CE/14 - HOM000031 (DIF template)**] which was used at the time of AR's referrals. The

Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF) which was also used at the time was developed in conjunction with the National Offender Management Service (now HMPPS) **[CE/14a – HOM000099 (VAF)]**. The current referral assessment tool, the Prevent Assessment Framework **[CE/15 - HOM000059 (PAF Template)]**, which was introduced from September 2024, was developed jointly by the Home Office and CTP Headquarters (CTPHQ), and CT-ARC.

29. In this section I provide an overview of the process by which referrals were assessed in 2019 – 2021, when AR's referrals were considered. Any material changes after that time are addressed at paragraphs 115 - 168 below which deal with the reviews and key changes to Prevent since 2021. CTP North West will be able to provide more detailed evidence on operational processes both at the time of AR's referrals and now.
30. There are several decision-making points in the Prevent system, including the initial referral by a frontline professional, the police assessment of the risk, and adoption and closure decisions by the Channel panel.
31. For the purposes of this statement, I have drawn on the findings of the recent Prevent end-to-end Thresholds Review, **[CE/16 – HOM000090 (Thresholds Review) (at pages 23-29)]** which usefully breaks down the process of a Prevent referral through the system. The Review identified and named six key Prevent decision-making points, or thresholds, where a person's suitability for Prevent support is considered. These six decision-making points are as follows:
  - (a) Threshold 1: 'Notice, check, share' or the point at which a referral is made
  - (b) Threshold 2: Counter-terrorism intelligence assessment and deconfliction
  - (c) Threshold 3: Prevent Gateway Assessment
  - (d) Threshold 4: Section 36 Decision to refer to Channel
  - (e) Threshold 5: Channel acceptance
  - (f) Threshold 6: Channel panel closure
32. There can be no rigid benchmark to meet the threshold for an initial referral to Prevent (Threshold 1) as often the person making a referral will have limited access to any wider picture of information. However, the threshold for progression of a referral through the system becomes tighter as it moves through. Rigorous decision-making criteria, together with robust risk assessment tools and training, are essential for CTP practitioners to exercise informed professional judgment around whether a case should progress

onwards to Channel or Police-Led Partnerships (PLP) or be referred out of Prevent for more appropriate forms of support.

33. There is no single profile of a radicalised person, nor is there a single pathway to being radicalised. Due to the complex nature of radicalisation, there are many factors which need to be considered, which can, either alone or combined, lead someone to subscribe to terrorist or terrorism-supporting ideology. These factors often include exposure to radicalising influences, real and perceived grievances – which can be created or exacerbated by extremists – and a person’s own susceptibility.
34. Susceptibility may be influenced by a person’s vulnerabilities (for example if they need special care, support or protection because of age, disability, risk of abuse or neglect). Such factors may also affect the early intervention approach that is required to divert someone away from radicalisation. But for some, personal vulnerabilities may not be relevant. Each case is unique and a range of considerations and factors should be taken into account at each stage to form a clearer picture.
35. When a referral is made to Prevent, the referral is sent to the police to begin a process of specialist assessment. The referrals are logged on to the Police Case Management Tracker (PCMT) – to which Prevent officers in all police forces across England and Wales have access to create and update records as appropriate. The Home Office does not have access to data within the PCMT until Threshold 5. The purpose of the system is to ensure a consistent approach to record keeping. I cover the 2024 updates to PCMT below.
36. Once a Prevent referral is logged, it follows the process below (Annex A to this witness statement provides a high-level visual representation of the pathway to Channel, extracted from **[CE/09 - HOM000021 (Channel Duty Guidance 2023) (at page 27)]**).
37. CTP intelligence officers from the Fixed Intelligence Management Unit (FIMU) conduct a deconfliction and triage exercise, checking the referral against a range of police records (Threshold 2). The outcome of the FIMU checks may lead to a referral being directed to Pursue for CT investigation or remaining in Prevent for further consideration. The FIMU assessment will ensure that any relevant information related to the referral that is held on police systems is available to the officers responsible for assessing the referral.

38. At this stage, should an immediate security threat be identified, the FIMU will escalate the case to Pursue.
39. A Counter-Terrorism Case Officer (CTCO) then conducts a Prevent Gateway Assessment (PGA) (Threshold 3). This is the initial screening and triage phase. **[CE/17 - HOM000042 (CTPHQ policy - Prevent Case Management by CTCOs and CTCO Supervisors August 2020) (at page 7)]**. CTCOs are members of police staff or warranted officers designated and trained to enact the Police Prevent statutory Duty under CTSA 2015. The PGA is informed by the information in the referral, the FIMU assessment and results of the FIMU's intelligence checks, and other available sources of information.
40. The PGA is a subjective assessment calling ultimately for professional judgment, but it is conducted in a structured way and underpinned by training and guidance. It was used at the time of AR's first referral in December 2019. At the time of AR's second and third referrals dated 1 February 2021 and 26 April 2021, the PGA was guided by a set of questions contained in a threat, risk and vulnerability assessment tool called the DIF. The use of the DIF to assess Prevent referrals was introduced by CTP in 2020. Training and guidance for police on the use of the DIF was a matter for CTP and the Home Office was not involved in the tool's development or implementation.
41. The DIF was replaced between September 2024 and January 2025 by a tool called the Prevent Referral Screen (PRS) within the new Prevent Assessment Framework, which is discussed further below. Under both the DIF and the PRS, a key part of the assessment is considering whether there is evidence of an ideology (which is discussed in more detail below) and there are a series of structured questions to be considered as part of that assessment.
42. Following the initial PGA, a decision (referred to as the 'gateway assessment' or 'gateway decision' in some materials) would be reached. It is now set out in Home Office's 2023 Prevent Duty Guidance **[CE/06 - HOM000014 (paragraph 49)]** that the test CTCOs apply at this stage is whether "there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a person is susceptible to becoming a terrorist or supporting terrorism". This test was not referenced in the earlier 2015 Prevent Duty Guidance. The Channel Duty Guidance 2023 also sets out that Prevent referrals are triaged by specialist police officers and staff who determine whether "there are reasonable grounds to suspect that a person is at risk of radicalisation" **[CE/09 - HOM000021 (at paragraph 70)]**, reflecting the test set out in the Prevent Duty

Guidance. Previous versions of the Prevent and Channel Duty Guidance do not state explicitly what test CTCOs would apply at this stage. However, my understanding is that at the time of each of AR's three referrals the threshold for the PGA, which would have been set out in CTP operational guidance together with details of the process that should be undertaken, was whether there were grounds for reasonable suspicion (as opposed to belief – which applies at the next stage). It is important to note that guidance set out in the Prevent and Channel Duty Guidance documents did not and still does not contain granular operational detail of CTP processes, which may need to adapt and change rapidly based on risk, although inevitably with each iteration of the guidance we are able to add more detail and information for practitioners.

43. There are four possible outcomes to the PGA decision **[CE/18 - HOM000055 (Home Office and CTPHQ 'Channel Dovetail Regional Hub Pilot Guidance for Local Authorities & Police', September 2018) (page 11)]**:

- (a) Closed to Prevent: If the CTCO does not consider the threshold is met to progress the individual within Prevent then they can close the case to Prevent. If during the assessment, the CTCO identifies vulnerabilities that are not "CT related", then a referral to mainstream services would be made **[CE/03 - HOM000064 (CONTEST 2018 (Figure 2.5 page 38))]**. This is often referred to as 'signposting' to other services for support. Guidance at the time of AR's referrals was (and remains) that individuals who are not suitable for Prevent should be referred for support from other services where that was more appropriate **[CE/07 - HOM000039 (Channel Duty Guidance 2015) (paragraph 20); CE/06 - HOM000014 (Prevent Duty Guidance 2023) (paragraphs 49 and 55)]**. This may include from healthcare providers or social services. If no vulnerabilities are identified, no further action is required.
- (b) Escalated to Pursue: A case will be escalated where a risk of an immediate security threat is identified **[CE/08 - HOM000020 (Channel Duty Guidance 2020) (paragraph 58)]** (if this had not already been the outcome at the FIMU stage).
- (c) Referred for management under a PLP. This is a Prevent outcome to manage individuals where Prevent relevant issues have been identified but they are not suitable for Channel and an escalation to Pursue is not indicated. **[CE/08 - HOM000020 (Channel Duty Guidance 2020) (paragraph 58)]** PLPs are discussed further below.
- (d) Progressed for information gathering. **[CE/08 - HOM000020 (Channel Duty Guidance 2020) (paragraph 61)]** This outcome is appropriate where the CTCO

assesses that the individual may be suitable for a referral to Channel pursuant to section 36(3) of the CTSA 2015.

44. The 'information gathering stage' enables the CTCO to seek more information to determine whether a referral to Channel should be made. Information is gathered from all relevant partners. Once the information gathering has concluded, an initial vulnerability assessment is conducted to enable the police to decide whether to make the referral to Channel. At the time of AR's referrals this was conducted using the VAF. This was replaced with the PAF between September 2024 and January 2025 which I address in more detail below.
45. The VAF was a Home Office-owned assessment tool developed in conjunction with the National Offender Management Service (now HMPPS) and based on the Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ tool that was designed to assess individuals with extremism-related convictions. It was built around three criteria: (i) engagement with a group, cause or ideology; (ii) intent to cause harm; (iii) capability to cause harm. The VAF required consideration of 22 factors that can contribute to vulnerability. The initial VAF assessment would either be conducted by a Channel Coordinator (local authority employed), or by a CTCO, depending on whether the Channel area was within the Dovetail pilot (Dovetail is explained below) or outside it. At the time of AR's referrals, the entire North West region was within the Dovetail pilot. Had AR been progressed following any of the Prevent referrals in 2019–2021, information gathering and the VAF would have been completed by a Channel Coordinator, but the decision on whether to make the referral to Channel under section 36 of the CTSA 2015 was a decision for CTP.
46. If following the multi-agency information gathering stage and based on the assessment made, the CTCO (or, from 2019, in Dovetail sites, the Channel Coordinator – see further below) forms a reasonable belief that the person is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism as per section 36(3) of the CTSA 2015, they will refer the case for discussion by a Channel panel. This is known as the 'section 36 decision' stage (Threshold 4). If a reasonable belief cannot be formed by the CTCO at this stage, then the case will be closed to Prevent and either exited or signposted for alternative support.

### *Repeat Referrals*

47. At the time of AR's referrals there was no formal Home Office or CTP policy or guidance on handling repeat referrals. In 2023, CTP introduced a repeat referral policy, which – as I cover below - was strengthened in March 2025.

### *Vulnerability Support Hubs*

48. Vulnerability Support Hubs were initially piloted in 2016 as a partnership between NHS forensic mental health teams and policing to manage individuals referred to CTP with known or suspected mental health difficulties or disorders. This included neurodivergent people and those with autism. The Hubs consisted of a multi-disciplinary team of forensic mental health professionals (mental health nurses, clinical and forensic psychologists and consultant forensic psychiatrists) who were able to use structured professional judgments to identify factors that affected an individual's mental health and vulnerability, which may put them at risk of being drawn into terrorism. In 2019, the Hubs provided expert advice to CTCOs which could be used to develop tailored support packages for individuals that were delivered via the Channel panel. They were commissioned by CTP. The Home Office was not involved in developing policies, training, or in the operational delivery of the Hubs. The Home Office did, however, take steps to promote the Hubs with Channel chairs and incorporated the Hubs into the Channel Duty Guidance from 2020 [**CE/08 - HOM000020 (at paragraph 141)**]. In April 2024, the Hubs were replaced by the CT Clinical Consultancy service which I address further below.

### **Channel panels**

49. Channel panels are chaired by local authorities. Members of the panel must include the responsible local authority and the police for the relevant area, and may include such other persons as the local authority considers appropriate. The Channel Duty Guidance provides a non-exhaustive list of groups which may be requested to provide a representative to attend the panel (including NHS, social workers, schools, further education colleges and universities, youth offending services, children's and adults' services, local safeguarding arrangements, local authority safeguarding managers, housing, immigration, prisons, probation and, from the 2020 iteration of the Channel Guidance, the local authority Early Help services).

50. To support the Duty, the first Channel Duty Guidance was published in 2015 [**CE/07 - HOM000039**]. It was updated and reissued in 2020 and 2023 [**CE/08 - HOM000020; CE/09 - HOM000021**].
51. The guidance at the time of AR's referrals was and remains that Channel panels should meet monthly (although now it is mandatory for panels to be held monthly where there are live Channel cases held by the panel) [**CE/07 - HOM000039 (Channel Duty Guidance 2015) (paragraph 67); CE/09 - HOM000021 (Channel Duty Guidance 2023) (paragraph 127)**].

#### *Channel adoption process*

52. When CTP make a referral to Channel pursuant to section 36(3) of the CTSA 2015, the multi-agency Channel panel will collectively assess the risk and decide whether to adopt the individual onto Channel. A decision to adopt will be made where the panel agrees a person is vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism that may be reduced through Channel support. The panel will then decide on a tailored package of support that can be offered to the person to help them move away from harmful activity. The panel will also consider the mitigation of any risk posed to potential support providers. At the time of AR's referrals, the panel would make those decisions by considering the information contained in the VAF assessment, information gathered from partners and using their professional expertise [**CE/07 - HOM000039 (paragraphs 68-69); CE/08 - HOM000020 (paragraphs 103-104); CE/09 - HOM000021 (pages 28-30) (Channel Duty Guidance 2015, 2020 and 2023)**]. That process has not materially changed since 2021, but the VAF has been replaced with the PAF (see further below).
53. Being referred to a Channel panel is not any form of punishment or criminal sanction. People can receive support before they begin, or once they are on, a trajectory towards participating in terrorist-related activity.
54. Channel is a voluntary process. Once a decision is made by the panel to offer support, the individual would be approached to explain the process and seek their informed consent. In the case of an individual who was under 18, consent would be required from their parent or guardian. [**CE/07 - HOM000039 (paragraphs 77-78); CE/08 - HOM000020 (paragraphs 118-126); CE/09 - HOM000021 (page 29) (Channel Duty Guidance 2015, 2020 and 2023)**]. In 2018/19, 24% of individuals who were offered support through

Channel did not consent. In 2019/20, 23% of those offered support did not consent [**CE/19 – HOM000102 (Home Office Security Analysis and Insight Consent Rate Analysis)**].

55. Once Channel consent has been obtained, the action plan to support the person can begin. Where an individual refuses to consent to Channel support, or the panel decides not to adopt a case, but concerns remain, CTP can consider the case for management under a PLP (see further below). The Channel panel – which includes police representatives - may also consider that the case is too high-risk to be managed by Channel. CTP can consider management under a PLP in these instances.

56. A proportion of referrals to Channel will not result in the individual being adopted onto Channel.<sup>9</sup> This may be because the panel has assessed that the person is not vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and therefore does not require Prevent support or because the person is too high risk for Prevent (so that they are escalated to Pursue or to a PLP as explained above) or because the person does not consent. These referrals will either be closed with no further action; referred to Pursue / a PLP; or signposted on to other services where a specific need has been identified.

#### *Interventions under Channel*

57. Where a person (or their parent or guardian on their behalf, if the person is under 18) consents to receive Channel support, a tailored support package will be offered. In 2019, this could have included support from social services, mental health services [**CE/07 - HOM000039 (Channel Duty Guidance 2015) (paragraph 82 and 89)**] support with education, or the provision of a specialist intervention provider to work on a one-to-one basis with the individual to counter extremist narratives.

58. Home Office-approved specialist intervention providers (IPs) are available to address all forms of terrorism and ideology, including Islamist extremism, extreme right-wing radicalisation, fascination with violence, and antisemitism. They possess an extensive understanding of extremist narratives, how to counter such narratives, and are skilled at

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<sup>9</sup> The proportion of total referrals that were discussed at a Channel panel that went on to be adopted as a Channel case was 42% in 2018/19, 48% in 2019/20, 50% in 2020/21, 54% in 2021/22, 58% in 2022/23 and 57% in 2023/24 [**CE/10a - HOM000166 (2018-2019); CE/10b - HOM000168 (2019-2020); CE/10c - HOM000169 (2020-2021); CE/10d – HOM000165 (2021-2022); CE/10e – HOM000164 (2022-2023); CE/10f – HOM000170 (2023-2024) (Prevent referral data)**].

building rapport with vulnerable individuals. They play an important role in the interventions process: providing assessment and one-to-one mentoring to individuals on Channel.

59. In 2019, most IPs were recruited as they were experts in Islamist extremism or extreme right-wing radicalisation, but some would have had adaptable and flexible skillsets that enabled them to offer effective support to individuals who were categorised (at that time) as having Mixed, Unstable or Unclear (MUU) ideology (see further below). The Home Office data for 2019 (again, see further below) shows that of the 697 cases adopted as Channel cases in the year 2019/2020, 127 (18%) of those were where the concern was categorised as MUU ideology and a proportion of those individuals would have been offered support by an IP with suitable skillsets. Since 2019, the Home Office has recruited a broader range of individuals as IPs, including those with expertise in supporting those with mental health concerns, autism, or wider vulnerabilities that may affect radicalisation risk.

60. Since April 2019, IPs have received a comprehensive professionalisation training programme, beginning with mandatory courses in report writing, personal safety, and advanced personal safety. Further training covers extremist ideologies, child and adult safeguarding, and autism awareness training (which was introduced in 2020). Monthly operational briefings delivered since January 2020 ensure IPs are well-informed on how the online environment can shape radicalisation. This assists their understanding of how their cases may be using social media to connect with extremists and the extremist content that can be found on social media platforms.

61. Tailored support to the individual will continue until the Channel panel is satisfied that either the risks of being drawn into terrorism have sufficiently reduced, or if their radicalisation risk has increased to a level where Channel support is no longer appropriate and other intervention is necessary. At this point the case will be closed, subject to further Channel panel review.

#### *Dovetail*

62. In 2016, a pilot, known as 'Dovetail' was set up to transfer Channel case management responsibilities from the police to local authorities. The pilot initially operated in nine local authority areas and was expanded in 2019 to cover the whole North West region. In areas

where the Dovetail pilot was operating, much of the responsibility for Channel coordination including case management, vulnerability assessment and commissioning of intervention providers, was moved from CTP to local authority Channel Coordinators (CCs). CTP retained responsibility for managing the risk and oversight of all S36 decisions.

63. The Dovetail pilot was officially ended by the Home Office in March 2024. After running for several years and having concluded an evaluation of the Dovetail pilot in October 2021 **[CE/20 - HOM000171 (Dovetail Evaluation, Findings Report (October 2021) conducted by Counter-Terrorism Analysis and Insight)]**, the Home Office gathered enough evidence to decide on a future single police-led operating model for Channel. The decision to end the Dovetail pilot nationally took into account various factors such as the findings of the Dovetail evaluation, value for money, delivery resilience, and the wider impact of the various measures to improve the consistency and quality of Channel delivery across the country over the previous years. For those areas that were participating in the pilot, the closure of Dovetail resulted in Channel case management being handed back from the local authority to the police.
64. The existence of Dovetail in the North West region at the time of AR's referrals may have affected decision-making, in particular the decision to place AR temporarily in PLP. The 2021 Dovetail evaluation found that there was sometimes friction in Dovetail areas between CTP and the local authority over role and responsibilities, including who was best placed to visit individuals and when a visit could occur **[CE/20 – HOM000171 (Dovetail Evaluation Report 2021) (at paragraph 3.3.1)]**. This was one factor that was considered in the Home Office decision to end the Dovetail pilot.
65. I am aware that the CTPHQ Interventions Organisational Learning Review (the Dignate 2 Review) noted that it had been observed that in some Dovetail sites the CTCOs making the decision at the PGA stage (Threshold 3) did so based on the section 36 CTSA threshold of 'believe' rather than the PGA threshold of 'suspect', and therefore more cases were being closed in Dovetail sites at the PGA stage than in other, non-Dovetail, sites **[CE/21 - CTPHQ000028 (CTPHQ Interventions Organisational Learning Review) (February 2025)]**. I do not know whether this observation relates to the 2019-2021 period in Dovetail sites specifically nor whether it pertains to the North West regional hub. The 2021 Dovetail evaluation did not address whether there were any disparities between Dovetail and non-Dovetail sites in the number of cases closed by CTCOs at the PGA stage (Threshold 3). It was noted, however, that local authorities had reported in

interviews that they felt police were in some cases reluctant to hand over responsibility. The data did indicate (although limitations to what could be drawn from that data were noted) that Dovetail sites may have had a lower threshold than non-Dovetail sites for the S36 decision to refer to the Channel panel.

### *Exiting Channel*

66. At any point, the multi-agency Channel process allows for a case to exit Channel where there are no further radicalisation concerns, including onward referral to other support agencies where wider support needs are still present. This could include support provided through mainstream services such as mental health or education, or specialist commissioned provision such as drug and alcohol services.
67. Following a decision to close a case to Channel, the Channel panel must, as a minimum, review the individual at least 6 months and 12 months from the point of case closure [**CE/07 - HOM000039 (Channel Duty Guidance 2015) (paragraph 90); CE/08 - HOM000020 (Channel Duty Guidance 2020) (paragraph 144)**]. This review process must be undertaken for all Prevent referrals that are adopted by the panel, including Channel cases that are adopted but are subsequently referred elsewhere or offered support under Channel. To inform the review process, information would be sought from Channel partners which would include for example police checks, social care involvement, and information from the referrer. Where new information that may have an impact on risk comes to light regarding a closed case pending review at 6 or 12 months, the Channel chair will be notified, and the case will be subject to re-assessment by the police.
68. Since October 2023, panels have had discretion to undertake more frequent reviews within the 12-month period and to include a further review (at a specified period) beyond the 12-month period [**CE/09 - HOM000021 (Channel Duty Guidance 2023) (paragraphs 86-88)**].<sup>10</sup> If there are still concerns that the person may be at risk of radicalising influences or is facing a life change which may place them at risk (e.g. bereavement, loss of employment or relationship breakdown), this should be determined on a case-by-case basis.

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<sup>10</sup> The overall review period must not exceed two years.

69. Equally, a case may not be suitable for continued management in Channel. Where the terrorism risk has escalated and has been assessed as moving beyond a safe level for management in Channel the case may be moved into Pursue, or it may still be assessed that the risk can be managed in Prevent but moved under CTP management in a PLP.

### **Police-led Partnerships**

70. PLPs adopt many of the same types of approaches used within the multi-agency processes of Channel.

71. CTP own the operational policy for PLPs. The aim of PLPs is to manage and reduce the risk around people, groups or institutions that may be at risk of radicalisation or alternatively that may have a radicalising influence on others. This has the effect of reducing overall terrorist risk. It does this by using both law enforcement capabilities, and capabilities that sit outside of law-enforcement, including health, education, and social service support.

72. The policy and operational decision-making of PLPs is led by police, working in partnership with other agencies, and CTPHQ held ownership of PLP policy and guidance between 2019-2021. At that time, Home Office had very minimal engagement in the delivery of PLP which was limited to ensuring access to IP support was available where required. The Home Office was not involved in setting policy or operational direction or providing assurance or oversight of the operation of PLP.

73. CTP may choose to manage individuals in PLP where they are considered not to be suitable for Channel, either because they do not consent, the case is considered too high-risk be managed within Channel, or where there are sensitivities due to the status of individuals subject to police terrorism investigations (although in January 2025 Channel policy was revised and individuals subject to terrorism investigation can, on a case by case basis, be considered for support under Channel). Cases in PLP, as in Channel, will require support or mitigation due to the risk of radicalisation.

74. There is no specific statutory underpinning for PLP. As such, decisions and assessments around whether a case is suitable for PLP are made on the basis of police-led risk assessment, rather than a statutory threshold as in Channel.
75. PLP provide a flexible risk management capability, and the opportunity for non-law enforcement partners – including Prevent statutory partners - to provide support to manage risk around individuals. There is no specific statutory obligation for non-statutory partners to participate and provide support, and PLP often relies on strong localised information sharing and cooperation arrangements.
76. Cases in PLP can be escalated into Pursue or PLP may run alongside Pursue investigations, but cases do not require an investigative or criminal element to sit in PLP – high risk and/or lack of consent is sufficient. In some cases, consent to engaging with interventions may be given by the individual under PLP management, which means the case can be re-adopted by the relevant Channel panel if appropriate.

### Youth Referrals

77. Prevent is an early intervention programme that can provide support to people of any age. It relies on specified authorities to identify people who may be susceptible to radicalisation and make a referral to Prevent.
78. Whilst members of the public will interact with these sectors, the sector which regularly generates the greatest volume of referrals to Prevent is the education sector. This was the case in 2019-2021, with: 1,887 referrals (33% of referrals) from March 2018-2019; 1,928 referrals (31%) from March 2019-2020; 1,221 referrals (25%) from March 2020-2021; and 2,305 referrals (36%) from March 2021-2022 [**CE/10a - HOM000166 (2018-2019), CE/10b - HOM000168 (2019-2020), CE/10c - HOM000169 (2020-2021) and CE/10d – HOM000165 (2021-2022) (Prevent referral data)**]).
79. In terms of the age of people referred during this period, people aged 20 and under have consistently accounted for most referrals, discussions at Channel panel, and Channel cases out of all Prevent referrals. In the year ending March 2019, of the 5,738 referrals, the majority of individuals (3,343; 58%) were aged 20 years or under. Those aged 20 years or under also made up the majority of the 1,320 individuals discussed at a Channel

panel (839; 64%) and the 561 individuals that were adopted as a Channel case (373; 66%). This is in line with previous data since the year ending March 2016.

80. In the year ending March 2020, of the 6,287 referrals, the majority were for individuals aged 20 years or under (3,423; 54%). Those aged 20 years or under also accounted for the majority of the 1,424 individuals discussed at a Channel panel (789; 55%) and the 697 individuals adopted as a Channel case (402; 58%).

81. In the year ending March 2022, individuals aged 15 to 20 again accounted for the largest proportion of the 6,406 referrals to Prevent (1,902; 30%) where age was known. This is in line with the year ending March 2021, where (1,398; 28%) of referrals where age was known, were in the 15 to 20 age group.

82. Educators are often in a unique position, through interacting with learners on a regular basis, to be able to identify concerning behaviour changes that may indicate they are susceptible to radicalisation. Given young people will spend a large proportion of their time at an educational establishment, and that teachers and staff within schools and colleges will spend time becoming familiar with pupils and students, they are well placed to be able to spot the signs of radicalisation and make a referral to Prevent.

83. The 2015 Prevent Duty Guidance (**[CE/05 - HOM000023]**) extant at the time of AR's referrals set out that specified authorities were expected to assess the risk of children being drawn into terrorism, including support for extremist ideas that are part of a terrorist ideology. This should be based on an understanding, shared with partners, of the potential risk in the local area.

84. The guidance also set out that specified authorities had to demonstrate that they were protecting children and young people from being drawn into terrorism by having robust safeguarding policies in place to identify children at risk, and intervening as appropriate. Institutions were asked to consider the level of risk to identify the most appropriate referral, which could include Channel or Children's Social Care, for example.

85. In addition, the 2015 Prevent Duty Guidance highlighted that local authorities have a duty to safeguard children in their area, regardless of the education or childcare setting they attend.

86. In 2018, the Home Office issued the Prevent Duty Toolkit for Local Authorities and Partner Agencies: Supplementary Information to the Prevent Duty Guidance for England and Wales **[CE/21a - HOM000172 (Prevent Duty Toolkit)]**. This Toolkit included a series of delivery benchmarks, including that there should be an agreed process in place for referrals, appropriate support should be offered, and a training programme should be in place for relevant personnel. It advised that Channel panels should have representation from relevant sectors including children's safeguarding, and that local authority partnerships should act in accordance with the general principles set out in the statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children.
87. All Prevent referrals, including children, are initially triaged by the police to determine whether existing investigations are underway, and to assess the suitability of Prevent support. All statutory partners also have a responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults to ensure they are protected from harm. At the time of AR's referrals neither the PGA assessment (Threshold 3) nor the Channel assessment (Threshold 5) differentiated between adults and minors.
88. Regarding the provision of Channel support for children between 2019-2021, statutory partners of Channel panels set out in Schedule 7 of the CTSA<sup>11</sup> were required under the legislation to put in place a support plan to reduce a child's vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism, and to make arrangements for support to be provided in accordance with the plan. Channel support is always age appropriate and bespoke to an individual's needs, with wide-ranging help available including with education, parental or carer support. Channel panel members and partners would also have been subject to wider statutory obligations to provide safeguarding and support services for children and young people, where there were wider vulnerabilities and concerns. The Channel Duty Guidance highlights the need for Channel chairs to draw in specialist services as part of Channel panel membership. This includes those with a child-centred remit, such as children's social care, youth offending services, education providers or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to ensure the provision of Channel support is coordinated and bespoke to identified need.

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<sup>11</sup> CTSA 2015, sch 7.

89. At the time of AR's referrals intervention providers working with people receiving Channel support were appropriately briefed and vetted to work with children and were required to have an understanding of child safeguarding policies and practices. This included the completion of DBS checks and from January 2019, Level 2 Child Safeguarding training. IPs at this time working with children would have had an understanding of how radicalisation risks may present in this demographic, and how to address any concerning views or behaviours.
90. Overall, in my professional assessment, between 2019-2021, Prevent and Channel was well-equipped to identify young people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism and to provide effective support to them. The Prevent Duty had been embedded across the education sector and child-centred services supported Channel decision-making and interventions. Tackling youth radicalisation is a fundamental part of Prevent, however I acknowledge the need to redouble our efforts and to further strengthen our capabilities in this area.

## **IDEOLOGY**

### **Categorisation of the 'type of concern'**

91. Since 2017 (drawing on data from 2015-2016) the Home Office has annually published statistical data arising from Prevent referrals. It is published to increase transparency around the Prevent programme and provide the public with an accurate source of information on Prevent. The statistical release details the pathway of Prevent referrals, showing how many referrals are received, discussed and subsequently adopted to Channel each year. The data is broken down by:
- (a) the source of the Prevent referral (i.e. whether it came from educational institutions, police, friends and family etc),
  - (b) the type of concern raised by the referral,
  - (c) region,
  - (d) demographics including age and sex, and
  - (e) the Channel case outcome.
92. The strategic analysis of Prevent management information data assists the Home Office's understanding of casework trends. It allows the Home Office to understand the types of concern that are being referred to Prevent, including both ideological and non-ideological

referrals. This data sets out the number of referrals by type of concern, how many of these were discussed at Channel panel, and how many were adopted. It is also possible to break this data down to provide analysis at a regional and sector level, as well as looking at the age of the subjects. Home Office understanding of strategic trends within casework informs policy and guidance and supports assessments on allocation of resources. The Home Office, with CTP, continually review the Prevent management information system and data collected to ensure it is fit for purpose.

93. From 2017 the 'type of concern' data was categorised into 4 high level categories: (i) Islamist; (ii) Extreme-Right Wing; (iii) MUU (iv) Other [**CE/10 - HOM000167 (Prevent Referral Data 2017-18) (Table D03)**]. These high-level categories were not the only categories recorded on the PCMT or the Channel Management Information System (CMIS) (the PCMT had 28 types of concern options, and the CMIS system had 7 types of concern options) and so, for statistical purposes, the sub-categories were aggregated within 4 high level categories. At the time of AR's referrals between 2019-2021, there was no singular 'fascination with violence' category for Prevent referrals to have been recorded under. The MUU category continued to increase through this period with half of all referrals in 2020/2021 being for MUU cases [**CE/10c - HOM000169 (Prevent Referral Data 2020-21) (Table 6)**]. This category potentially captured individuals that may have been obsessed with extreme or mass violence without targeting a particular group but lacked the sub-categories that were later added.

94. From 2021/22 (year ending March 2022), for the type of concern associated with referrals, in the Home Office statistical release, Home Office analysts improved the way in which a referral's type of concern was presented. From this time, the sub-categories that were aggregated into MUU in previous years were reported directly to provide a more granular view of types of concern (**CE/10d - HOM000165 (Prevent Referral Data 2021-22) (Table 6)**). The longer list of published categories for the type of concern was: (i) Islamist, (ii) Extreme Right Wing, (iii) Incel; (iv) School massacre; (v) High CT risk but no ideology present; (vi) Vulnerability present but no ideology or CT risk; (vii) No risk, vulnerability or ideology (viii) Conflicted; (ix) No specific extremism issue; (x) Other (including e.g. left wing extremism and animal rights extremism). At this point, the official statistics did not include a specific category for 'type of concern' relating to fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attack. I consider it likely that referrals presenting with the latter type of concern and risk factors were recorded under other categories. The potential overlap between the longer list of categories, the lack of clear guidance on types of

concern at the time, and scope for different professional judgments means that the size of this cohort cannot be accurately determined from the data we hold from this period.

95. The Home Office, working with CTP, undertook work during 2023 and early 2024 to review the 'type of concern' categories to reflect changes in the cohort and emerging risk and threat.
96. From 1 May 2024, the categorisation list in the PCMT indicating the 'type of concern' for referrals, cases discussed and cases adopted onto Channel, was refreshed. This was in response to a recommendation by Sir William Shawcross in the Independent Review of Prevent 2023, to improve Prevent datasets by revising how referrals were categorised (addressed further below). This refresh included completing research to deepen understanding of how the MUU category had been used previously in Prevent casework – including where MUU was used to cover 'school massacre' and wider violence fascination concerns - and implementing and sharing recommendations with Prevent practitioners and police.
97. As part of this refresh, on the new PCMT (see further below) the 'school massacre' category was replaced with 'fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks (where no other ideology)' which more accurately represents the cases being referred to Prevent of this nature. The refreshed list of 'type of concern' categories will be reflected in the next statistical release which is due to be published in the autumn of 2025.
98. Whilst the current and previous policy position, underpinned by guidance, communications, training and assessment tools, has permitted sufficient flexibility for those with a fascination with extreme violence to be referred and considered for Prevent support, I consider that it is clearer now than it was at the time of AR's referrals that, for Prevent purposes, an individual showing fascination with extreme violence apparently without an ideological driver could be considered for Prevent support.

### **Categorisation of AR's referrals**

99. AR's first Prevent referral was categorised as MUU / School massacre on the PCMT [CE/22 - HOM000060 (Prevent Referral Log for AR)]. Save for material received post-attack, the Home Office does not hold any identifiable data about AR's second and third

referrals as, from 1 April 2020, CTP shared only pseudonymised data with the Home Office (and the referrals were both closed to Prevent) and so I cannot say whether/how they were categorised.

### **Mixed, Unstable or Unclear ideology**

100. In the UK the terrorist threat is dominated by individuals or small groups operating outside of organised terrorist groups and networks. The most significant domestic threat comes from Islamist terrorism, followed by extreme right-wing terrorism. Prevent referral data, which was first published on 13 December 2018 [**CE/23 – HOM000104 (Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2017 to March 2018 Statistical Bulletin)**] indicated that in 2017/18, of the 7,318 individuals referred, 3,197 (44%) were referred for concerns related to Islamist extremism and 1,312 (18%) were referred for concerns related to right wing extremism.
101. The role of ideology in radicalisation has become increasingly complex over the last few years. Individuals are increasingly adopting a mix of ideas from different ideologies, conspiracy theories and grievance narratives, often found online. This trend is reflected in people identified as susceptible to radicalisation and subsequently referred to Prevent. It makes it more challenging to assess the motivation of an individual's violence, to determine the most appropriate mitigations to put in place, and to judge whether that violence constitutes an act of terrorism.
102. The MUU category was introduced in 2017 because of the marked increase in referrals with no clear ideology present. The category was used to reflect instances where the ideology presented involves a combination of elements from multiple ideologies (mixed), shifts between different ideologies (unstable), or where the individual does not present a coherent ideology yet may still pose a terrorism-related risk (unclear).
103. Data from 2017/18 highlighted an increase in referrals which were categorised as MUU. In 2016/2017, 696 out of 6,093 Prevent referrals were classified as MUU. In 2017/2018, 1,982 out of 7,318 were classified as MUU, representing an increase by 185% of the number of MUU referrals [**CE/10 - HOM000167(2017-2018) (Prevent referral data)**]. The data also showed that only 12 individuals for whom the referral was categorised as MUU received Channel support.

104. The MUU sub-category, 'School Massacre' was added to PCMT by CTP in 2018/19. This reflected the increasing number of cases of this nature that were being seen and sought to capture the specific type of concerns coming into the Prevent system. A joint letter was issued to the Prevent network on 25 June 2019 from the then Director of Prevent and the National Coordinator of Prevent, National Counter-Terrorism Policing Headquarters.<sup>12</sup> **[CE/24 - HOM000048 (Joint letter to the Prevent Network)]**. The letter provided guidance and detailed that individuals whose ideological motivations are mixed, unclear or unstable, but who demonstrate a connection to, or personal interest in, extremism, terrorism or massacre, should be given the same consideration for Prevent support as those who present clear ideological motivations.
105. The Home Office undertook a research project in 2023 to understand more about the nature of referrals for those categorised as Mixed, Unclear or Unstable. The research aimed to understand what 'MUU' is, and who is within this cohort; how cases are managed and supported through the Prevent system; and what could be driving the increase of MUU referrals and cases. The key findings from the research and the recommendations were circulated to the Prevent network (including Channel Chairs, CTCOs and Regional CTP Prevent leads, Home Office Prevent Advisers, local authorities, DfE, NHS and IPs) **[CE/25 – HOM000091 (Summary of HSAI research into MUU Casework in Prevent); CE/25a – HOM000097 (HSAI research into MUU Casework in Prevent)]**. The recommendations included advice that practitioners should *'should continue to exercise professional judgement and consider referrals where there are concerns about potential radicalisation even if the precise ideological driver is unclear'* and that *'any concern that someone may be susceptible to radicalisation or could be on a pathway to terrorism should be referred into Prevent, even when the precise ideological driver is not known'*. The advice encouraged practitioners to ensure their training was up to date. It informed practitioners that we will 'no longer use the 'MUU' terminology due to the variation in understanding and use' and gave the list of Prevent ideology categories which were to be used from April 2024 **[CE/25b – HOM000094 (Prevent ideology categories)]**. Channel Chairs and CTP were also provided with a summary of the research and advice including a reminder that cases should be recorded under the dominant ideology or type of concern where appropriate.

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<sup>12</sup>Recipients were police regional coordinators, Channel panel chairs, local authority coordinators, higher & further education coordinators, Prevent education officers, and health Prevent coordinators.

106. The Home Office set up a working group to consider the policy position for cases with no clear ideology (including school massacre / fascination with extreme violence and mass casualty attacks) which first met on 2 July 2024. The working group agreed that the policy position, that these cases can be included in Prevent if there are concerns the individual is vulnerable to terrorism, was correct and planned to reiterate this to the network along with some research which was due to conclude in December 2024. Due to the Southport attack and trial, the work to re-issue to policy was paused. Instead, the Home Office conducted a comprehensive review of Prevent thresholds to ensure that we fully understand the factors affecting decision-making, including where there is not a clear terrorist ideology. The recommendations from this review are currently being delivered; this includes work to make it clear that a clear ideology is not a mandatory requirement for Prevent, providing the individual is considered to be susceptible to radicalisation.
107. I have considered whether the Home Office would have expected AR to be referred to Channel (in 2019 and 2021) had he been viewing similar material that was consistent with a single ideology. While professional judgment may vary, and there is a risk of over simplifying when applying counterfactuals, I consider it is more likely that AR would have been referred to Channel in 2019 if the material he had been reviewing and comments he had been making had aligned with a single ideology. He would also have been more likely to have been adopted as a Channel case and therefore be eligible for multi-agency case management. His adoption to Channel would ultimately have been subject to his / his parents' consent and his willingness to engage with any support offered.

#### **HOME OFFICE KNOWLEDGE OF AR**

108. AR was not individually known to the Home Office prior to the Southport attack.
109. The Home Office was subsequently informed through post-incident counter-terrorism communications on the day of the attack that three Prevent referrals had been made for AR, but none of these was progressed to Channel for discussion, with each being closed at the point of initial assessment by CTP. It will be for CTP to address the operational decisions made in relation to the Prevent referrals.

110. The only data the Home Office held regarding AR prior to the attack has been disclosed in **[CE/22 - HOM000060 (Prevent Referral Log for AR)]**, which is a data consolidation of two rows of data which have been exported from spreadsheets containing thousands of Prevent referrals, of which AR was one. This data was held by the Home Office for the sole purpose of producing national Prevent statistics that were published on Gov.UK and was not used to interrogate the details of any individual case. The two rows included have been excerpted from two of these spreadsheets, as they contain every single data point the Home Office held on AR across all versions and formats of this dataset.
111. The annual Prevent statistics were historically compiled by merging data from two systems: PCMT (owned by CTP) and CMIS (owned by the Home Office). Up to 31 March 2020, CTP shared personal data (e.g. names, dates of birth) with the Home Office to enable data matching. From 1 April 2020, CTP stopped sharing personal identifiers and carried out the matching themselves, providing only pseudonymised data to the Home Office.
112. As a result, while the Home Office holds referral data for individuals after 1 April 2020, it is pseudonymised. Searching by name is not possible, and any lookup would need to be done using referral reference numbers. Home Office analysts use this data solely for strategic analysis and production of the published statistics and do not research individual cases.

### **REVIEWS AND KEY CHANGES IN PREVENT SINCE 2021**

113. In this section, I set out firstly a summary of the Independent Review of Prevent in 2023, which was a review of the programme which led to some key changes. I then summarise the changes made following – and largely in response to – that review.

### **Independent Review of Prevent report (“IRP report”) 8 February 2023: Recommendations and Government Response**

114. During the passage of the Counter Terrorism and Border Security Act 2019, the Government committed to carrying out an independent review of Prevent. In 2021, Sir William Shawcross was appointed as the Independent Reviewer of Prevent, tasked to consider the strategy and delivery of Prevent. Sir William’s IRP report **[CE/26 –**

**HOM000071]** was published on 8 February 2023. It set out 34 recommendations which were centred around four guiding principles:

- (a) Prevent should go back to first principles and reassert its overall objective of stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Its focus should always centre upon protection of the public from those inclined to pose a security threat.
- (b) Prevent needs to develop expertise and instil better levels of understanding of extremist ideology and radicalisation across the system.
- (c) Prevent needs to enhance its approach to delivery, which should involve restructuring to a regional model (as well as moving away from short term annual funding cycles when projects warrant it and considering the expansion of the Prevent Duty to an increased number of public agencies).
- (d) Prevent should create processes for responding to disinformation being spread about the scheme. Equally, Prevent should encourage public trust by improving transparency and establishing better oversight of how the strategy is implemented.

115. In the Government response, published the same day, all 34 recommendations were accepted.

116. In February 2024, a one-year-on IRP report [**CE/27 - HOM000070**] was published by the Government, setting out the extensive work and progress made against each of the 34 recommendations. 33 of the recommendations were implemented by February 2024 including strengthening guidance and training, regionalising Prevent delivery and improving case management. One recommendation remains outstanding: this involves amending primary legislation to reflect new Prevent objectives. Although the primary legislative amend has not yet been made, the new objectives have been reflected in CONTEST 2023, statutory guidance (see paragraph 16 above which sets out the new objectives).

### **Key changes following the IRP 2023**

#### *New Guidance*

117. In response to the IRP findings, the Prevent Duty Guidance and Channel Duty Guidance were updated.

118. The revised Prevent Duty Guidance **[CE/06 - HOM000014]** was published on 7 September 2023, coming into force on 31 December 2023, with the following key changes:

- (a) amending the first Prevent objective to 'tackle the ideological causes of terrorism';
- (b) clearly setting out that the threat from terrorism is becoming more diverse, but Islamist terrorism currently remains our primary domestic terrorist threat;
- (c) outlining the new Security Threat Check, which consists of three questions (namely, whether the proposed action is: (i) mindful of the UK's current terrorism and extremism threat picture; (ii) proportionate when placed against the UK's current terrorism and extremism threat picture; (iii) likely to reduce the threat of terrorism or terrorist-adjacent narratives, to ensure that high-level decision-making within Prevent is always informed by proper consideration of the terrorism threat picture;
- (d) emphasising that as Prevent is a counter-terrorism capability, the presence, or possible presence, of any terrorist or terrorism linked ideology will be an important consideration for frontline professionals in deciding whether to make a referral to Prevent (whilst recognising that there may be times where the precise ideological driver is not clear but that it is better to receive referrals that turn out not to be of concern than missing someone who genuinely needs support);
- (e) clearer advice to sectors under the Duty on how to understand and manage risk, including through training and risk assessments;
- (f) including 'Reducing Permissive Environments' as a key theme to tackle the ideological causes of terrorism and broader radicalising influences. Drawing out this theme encourages the challenging of ideas linked to terrorism such as antisemitism or using blasphemy to justify violence; and
- (g) clarifying appropriate terminology, with 'susceptibility to radicalisation' introduced. The term 'vulnerability' was also clearly defined to ensure it is only used when appropriate (paragraph 37 of the Prevent Duty Guidance 2023 states: "A person can be vulnerable if they need special care, support or protection because of age, disability, risk of abuse or neglect." **[CE/06 - HOM000014]**).

119. New Channel Duty Guidance **[CE/09 - HOM000021]** was also issued on 9 October 2023, in response to the recommendations of the IRP. This was to strengthen the Home Office's quality assurance of how Channel is delivered and to respond swiftly to tackle any disparities in operational practice. It was informed by wide stakeholder consultation. Key changes included:

- (a) a greater focus on ideology and the introduction of mechanisms and tools for practitioners to support decision-making. This included the new Security Threat Check for strategic decision making (see above), provision of a new training offer, and the new PAF tool (which I explain in more detail below) for CTP and panel use.
- (b) Providing guidance on applying the new terminology on “susceptibility” to radicalisation, including by highlighting that not all individuals susceptible to radicalisation will be a vulnerable person or lack individual agency.
- (c) An explanation of the new quality assurance checks within the Channel case load to improve consistency of decision-making and provide assurance on unbiased Channel decision-making on ideology (the “Channel Quality Assurance Framework”, detailed at paragraph 138 below).
- (d) Updates to the operation of the Channel panel process, e.g. additional measures for oversight following case closure, including guidance on reaching out to the individual’s family in cases where family has been identified as a protective factor, and measures to scope the extension of Channel support where the threshold for criminal investigations has been met.

*Prevent Assessment Framework (PAF)*

- 120. The PAF was rolled out across regions in September 2024, after extensive development, testing and piloting. It was part of the Government’s response to the IRP and addressed key learning from the Forbury Gardens attack and the murder of Sir David Amess. It strengthens Prevent case management and helps to ensure robust, consistent and proportionate decision-making on counter-terrorism risk. It replaced the VAF, which had been used previously.
- 121. The PAF is a new streamlined tool, developed by the expert CT-ARC, based on the most up to date evidence and learning. It is used to triage all Prevent referrals and to identify and assess counter-terrorism risk. An example of a blank PAF is exhibited at **[CE/15 - HOM000059]**.
- 122. The PAF is completed by a local CTCO or specialist police staff and is used from the PGA stage and thereafter throughout the individual’s time on Channel. It includes fields to record: whether the person has previously been referred; whether various listed indicators of concern are applicable; a susceptibility assessment with various factors to be

considered including engagement factors like mental health and complex needs or social isolation; intent factors like “antisocial or violence supportive attitudes”; capability factors such as criminal history; and protective and risk mitigating factors. It also contains a section on support planning.

123. The PAF serves as a live document that enables each factor to be kept closely under review and progress to be effectively monitored, allowing for a change in approach to case management as necessary. Once completed, it provides an overview of a person’s susceptibility to radicalisation, and their risks of committing or supporting terrorism.

124. The PAF tool is more rigorous than the VAF with the following key benefits:

- (a) ensuring that thresholds and decision-making are implemented consistently across all terrorism threats, ideological and non-ideological, by creating a framework that is easily understood;
- (b) it better reflects research and understanding of those susceptible to radicalisation, is easier to use by CTP, and takes less time to complete;
- (c) earlier and more accurate identification of referrals that are suitable for Prevent and that can be supported through the multi-agency Channel process (ensuring only those susceptible to radicalisation receive support);
- (d) improved supporting processes to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the risk assessment process for all referrals adopted as a Prevent case, helping ensure individuals get the support they need to move away from radicalisation.

125. The tool has been thoroughly tested and endorsed by independent experts: it was reviewed by independent experts on the Correctional Services Advice and Accreditation Panel (CSAAP) during the tool’s development and the Panel subsequently endorsed its rollout. The PAF will continue to be monitored with CT-ARC and CTPHQ to ensure it is robust, efficient, evidence informed, operationally viable and well-integrated into the current system.

126. Prior to using the PAF, CTCOs must attend an assessed training day organised by CTP to learn how to complete the PAF and understand how it fits into current processes. During the training day, there are three assessment points where attendees will be assessed as either ‘Ready’ or ‘Not Yet Ready’ to independently complete a PAF for live cases. If ‘Not Ready’, attendees will be provided a further opportunity to complete the task training.

### *Recording referrals*

127. As Prevent has evolved, so have the systems for recording referrals and supporting case management functions. All referrals are logged onto the PCMT. As part of the Home Office's commitment to continuous improvement in the management of Prevent information, in May 2024 an enhanced 'joint' system for recording Prevent referrals and Channel case management data was launched to reduce duplication and enhance data quality and recording. The process for collecting Prevent data remains largely the same, but the way in which it is recorded has changed.
128. The new system streamlines Prevent and Channel case management by providing a more efficient IT platform that stores the data for both Prevent referrals and Channel case management in one place. This helps improve CTP's data recording and retrieval for use in Channel panels. It also improves case management via auditable records, which assists Home Office Channel Quality Assurance activities and the completion of Prevent learning reviews. Data entry access is restricted to CTP officers, with the Home Office retaining read access for assurance and evaluation purposes for Channel cases only.

### *New training*

129. The Prevent Training service was updated in August 2023 in line with IRP recommendations, the CONTEST 2023 guidance, and the refreshed Prevent Duty Guidance to ensure consistent use of terminology across Prevent. Changes included replacing the term 'vulnerable' with 'susceptible', ensuring consistent thresholds across all ideologies, and reflecting Prevent's first objective of tackling the ideological causes of terrorism. The Home Office is committed to keeping the training's content under review and adding further tailored content to support users under the Duty as needs arise and the threat evolves.
130. Frontline staff such as teachers, healthcare staff, and social workers can now also benefit from expert-led bespoke ideology training supported by the Commission for Countering Extremism that was piloted in summer 2024 and rolled out nationally in November 2024. This training package sits alongside core Prevent face-to-face training, to enhance awareness and understanding of key extremist ideologies amongst frontline staff.

131. Since 2019, there has also been a professionalisation and support programme for Channel chairs, deputies and panel members, comprising enhanced training provision, panel observations and Channel peer support, recognising the importance of Channel panels as part of Prevent delivery, and the related roles within them.

#### *Improving the local delivery model*

132. Regionalisation (i.e. restructuring Prevent to a more regional model) had already started before the IRP, but following the IRP and its recommendation to move Prevent delivery to a regionalised model, this was rolled out nationally.

133. Previously, the threat from radicalisation was contained in a relatively small number of local authorities. With the emergence of online radicalisation, the threat has become more diffuse and UK-wide. Terrorist attacks over the last few years demonstrate that a local authority does not need to be high threat to be high risk.

134. In response, the Home Office evolved the Prevent local delivery model to ensure every local authority has ready access to expertise, best practice, and support in tackling local radicalisation risks. Under the new regional model, the Home Office funds fewer local authorities (20 areas of the highest threat and risk) and instead maintains an expert network of Home Office Prevent advisers offering support and advice in each region, and in devolved administrations. This enables specialist Prevent support, via the Prevent advisers, to be provided to all local authorities, raising Prevent delivery standards and supporting partners to better identify and mitigate the more variable and complex threat and risk. The Home Office regional network mirrors the geographic coverage of regional police counter-terrorism units.

135. The Preventing Radicalisation Initiative was also established to enable all local authorities to access projects delivered by civil society organisations (see paragraph 25(c) above) that tackle radicalisation risks in their areas.

#### *Assurance*

136. The new 'Prevent Duty toolkit for local authorities' [**CE/28 – HOM000131 (Prevent duty guidance: Local authority toolkit)**] was published on 7 September 2023 in response to the IRP. It outlines eight benchmarks that Prevent delivery is measured against and includes suggested examples of good and best practice. The Home Office works with all

local authorities' Prevent Leads in England and Wales to complete a Prevent assurance exercise annually against seven of the eight Prevent Duty benchmarks. An assurance of the eighth benchmark, Channel, is subject to a separate process (i.e. the Channel Annual Assurance Statement, set out below).

137. This exercise provides local Prevent Partnerships and the Home Office with assurances that the Prevent Duty is being met in proportion to the threat and risk in each area. It also helps to understand where there are gaps in Prevent delivery, to identify and share good practice, and to improve performance and standards, which often involves direct support from the Home Office.
138. The Channel Quality Assurance Framework [**CE/29 – HOM000086**] was launched in March 2021 by the Home Office and was updated in March 2024. The framework provides increased rigour to panel processes, with strengthened governance and accountability of Channel panels at the local and national level. This includes the Home Office assessing panel performance, providing targeted support and direction to improve, Channel panel observations, and the sharing of good and emerging practice.
139. The Channel Assurance Statement was introduced in February 2021 and forms part of the quality assurance framework for all Channel panels across England and Wales (and their equivalents in Scotland). The Channel Assurance Statement requires each local authority to provide an honest critique of the arrangements in place capturing their individual compliance with the requirements laid out under sections 36 – 41 CTSA (as amended by the Counter Terrorism Border Security Act 2019) relating to Channel panels [**CE/29a – HOM000093 (blank Channel Assurance Statement)**]. It includes an enhanced role for the Home Office in strengthening oversight of panels, enabling those requiring assistance and support to be identified. This is integrated with the professionalisation and support programme for members of Channel set out under “New Training” above.

#### **Other changes to Prevent and Channel**

140. I set out below other relevant changes to Prevent and Channel which are relevant to the issues the Inquiry is examining.

### *Approach to repeat referrals*

141. In 2023, CTP introduced a repeat referral policy [**CE/30 - HOM000049 (CTP Guidance on Multiple Referrals)**], which – as I cover below – was updated in March 2025 [**CE/31-HOM000100 (Letter to Prevent network March 2025 summarising updates to repeat referral policy); CE/31a – HOM000095 (CTP Guidance on Multiple Referrals version 2.0, 2025)**] (following the Southport attack). CTP will be best placed to address the reasons underlying the introduction of the policy and the policy itself. In short, the policy set out that new referrals for an open case must be regarded “as a potentially heightened risk factor in CTCO assessments of the Subject”. This policy was not in place at the time of AR’s referrals.

### *CT Clinical Consultancy Service*

142. Launched on 2 April 2024, the CT Clinical Consultancy Service (CCS) replaced the pilot Vulnerability Support Hubs and delivers an expanded national and consistent service with equity of access across all regions of England and Wales. The team comprises CTP, Consultant Forensic Psychiatry, Consultant Forensic Psychology, Mental Health Nursing and social work. It operates in support of CTP and case holders to enhance understanding of the mental health elements and or neurodiverse conditions indicated on a referral and offer tactical advice on information sharing and interventions within health. It is accessible nationally via CTP through an online platform or in person in regional hubs.

143. The CCS is a service provided, commissioned and contracted by CTP. Whilst the Home Office supports this specialist provision, it is an operational service to aid CTP Officers in carrying out their functions. The Home Office holds no responsibility for service delivery or for directing how Prevent Officers use the capability. The Home Office function in this regard has not extended beyond ensuring alignment with Home Office policy and making Channel panels aware of the resource and how to request CCS advice via CTCOs.

### *Autism specific training*

144. In response to feedback from Channel panels, in August 2021, the Home Office introduced autism training for Channel practitioners. This training is delivered by the National Autistic Society (NAS) and aims to help course attendees to understand autism in the context of extremism and radicalisation (see for example [**CE/31b – HOM000084 (Understanding Autism, Extremism and Radicalisation PowerPoint slides); CE/31c**

– **HOM000101 (Introduction to autism for CPCs and IPs 2024 PowerPoint slides)].** Whilst not mandatory, the Home Office has ensured the NAS training is available to all Channel panel members and intervention providers. This training does not extend to CTP, who are responsible for training their own staff. I understand from AR's sentencing that in an Intermediary Assessment Report dated 24 September 2024, it was set out that AR presented as having high functioning Autism [**CE/02 - HOM000103 (Sentencing remarks of Goose J) (paragraph 33)].**

#### *PLP improvement*

145. As part of the Routes to Interventions programme, CTP and the Home Office agreed in early 2024 that the Home Office would provide strategic oversight and policy support to develop and improve the PLP model. Progress has been made to provide clearer policy and guidance to local and regional PLP leads on how to run panels and provide support, and joint work is ongoing between the Home Office and CTP to identify further opportunities to strengthen the model and develop an assurance capability.

#### *Youth Referrals*

146. 17 individuals aged '17 and under' were charged with terrorism-related activity in the year ending March 2024.<sup>13</sup>

147. Young people make up a significant proportion of Prevent referrals and Channel cases. Where age is specified, in the year ending March 2024, over half of referrals (3,918; 57%) to Prevent were for individuals under the age of 18. In the year ending March 2024, those under the age of 18 accounted for most referrals discussed at Channel panel (526, 59%) and adopted as a Channel case (351, 67%) [**CE/10f - HOM000170 (2023-2024) (Prevent referral data)].**

148. Since mid-2023, HSG have chaired a joint Prevent-Pursue board, bringing together operational partners across government to identify and address gaps in our approach to young people in the CT system. This board – the Minors Senior Oversight Group (SOG)

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<sup>13</sup> This figure includes all charges under terrorism legislation and all charges under non-terrorism legislation where the offence was considered by the CTPHQ Coordination Centre to be terrorism related. The figure is based on the latest position with each case as at the date of data provision from CTPHQ Coordination Centre (18 April 2025).

- delivers a substantial programme of work to reduce the number of children under investigation for terrorism offences.

149. The collective efforts of SOG partners mean we now have measures in place to reduce the number of children being arrested for terrorism related activity while still managing risk. There are several long-term work strands in train to improve HMG's ability to manage risk in this area, in particular:

- (a) Youth Diversion Orders (YDOs) – I address these in detail below;
- (b) Counter Terrorism Investigation of Minors Outcomes Toolkit (CTIMs): this toolkit has been produced by specialists in CTP, Youth Justice and Safeguarding leads to offer alternative tactics that assist investigators. In cases involving minors, prosecution alone may not remove the risk, address vulnerabilities or result in a prison sentence. Therefore, Senior Investigating Officers are encouraged to consider whether there are other ways of reducing risk and safeguarding young people and society, using a range of civil tools, multi-agency capabilities, and support services outlined in the toolkit.

150. Prevent is also working to address identified gaps and areas for improvement across the system, many of which will directly benefit the youth cohort. This includes extending Channel to individuals under overt investigation, improving handovers to other services, and growing our interventions offer, for example, by expanding and developing family interventions. Combined, this amounts to a significant amount of improvement activity and new policy approaches within the CT system.

151. Online activity is hugely significant in the radicalisation of young people: many under 18s convicted of terrorism offences commit the offence online (e.g. disseminating terrorist publications). Prevent aims to prevent individuals from becoming radicalised online by engaging industry, law enforcement and partners to reduce the availability and accessibility of terrorist content. This includes working to define borderline content that justifies, advocates or glorifies violence, which falls below UK legislative thresholds. HSG also engages tech companies to understand the extent their own terms of service already capture and prohibit this content and how effectively those terms are enforced. Alongside engaging industry, Prevent also works with statutory sectors to build their understanding of online radicalisation and how young people may be engaging with content online. The Home Office has disclosed to the Inquiry a Briefing Note to Schools [CE/32 - HOM000068] which is one such example of this.

## REVIEWS FOLLOWING THE ATTACK

### Independent Prevent Learning Review – August to September 2024

152. Following the Southport attack, an independent Prevent Learning Review (PLR) was jointly commissioned by Home Office Prevent and CTP to review AR's prior referrals to Prevent. The PLR [CE/33 - HOM000062] was commissioned on 2 August 2024 and concluded on 4 September 2024. I considered it important that a swift review was undertaken immediately to identify organisational learning and further areas for development. The PLR was necessarily limited, as no activity could take place that might compromise, jeopardise or in any way undermine the integrity of ongoing criminal investigations and judicial proceedings. It was, therefore, a desktop review only.
153. Key findings from the review indicated that overall, the reviewer considered there to have been a high level of compliance by the Prevent officers with process timescales, assessment completion, and adherence to policy that was in place at the time. However, although processes and policies were largely followed correctly, the reviewer identified several subjective decision points where risk could have been assessed differently, which may have led to the provision of Prevent support.
154. The reviewer identified several areas for learning to strengthen risk assessments, particularly around the understanding of indicators of radicalisation where a coherent ideology may not be present, and to recognise the potential risk from repeat referrals. The reviewer also made recommendations to strengthen training and guidance, and to improve assurance processes. The reviewer concluded that there were sufficient concerns with the first referral to warrant the case remaining open and being referred to Channel. The repeat nature of the Prevent referrals, unknown nature of engagement and high level of susceptibility indicated that more time was needed to assess the case.
155. The reviewer also recommended that:
- (a) Referrals involving children and / or complex needs should be routinely referred to Channel (rather than PLPs) unless immediate closure is the chosen option, or the CT risks are deemed too high for Channel (recommendation 5).
  - (b) The Home Office's level of access to PCMT (which is limited as above) should be reviewed to enable scrutiny at all levels of Prevent delivery as part of quality and business assurance processes (recommendation 6).

(c) Consideration be given to guidance on how repeat referrals are combined with previous referrals to reflect the repeat nature (recommendation 13).

156. On the reviewer's recommendation that Home Office should have full access to the PCMT system, CTP have taken steps to provide a small number of Home Office Prevent staff with access to live data on referral trends to aid analysis and insight into the Prevent system. Further discussions are underway on wider data access and how we can together improve assurance of Prevent decision-making.
157. In April 2025, new policy was jointly agreed by the Home Office and CTPHQ to strengthen consistency of decision-making on referrals where a fascination with extreme violence has been identified. Under this new policy, CTCOs require agreement from a senior supervising officer to exit an individual from Prevent prior to Channel if such concerns have been identified. Guidance has also been circulated to Channel panels to encourage adoption of such referrals where appropriate.
158. Measures were introduced in March 2025 to strengthen assurance on repeat referrals. This work has been jointly developed and agreed by the Home Office and CTPHQ in response to the changing profile of those requiring support, and the need to increase consistency in the assessment and progression of Prevent referrals. Under the new repeat referral policy that is now in place, CTCOs require agreement from a senior supervising officer, if they assess that an individual that has been referred to Prevent more than once does not meet the threshold for onwards referral to Channel.
159. The PCMT was updated in May 2025 to enable CTCOs to 'tag/flag' repeat referrals, to make them more visible to officers and enable greater evaluation of these cases.
160. Where repeat referrals are presented to Channel panels for multi-agency consideration, policy has been updated to adopt these as cases where appropriate - if there are concerns that the person may be on a pathway that could lead to terrorism. Where a decision is made not to adopt, there is a requirement for onward signposting to other services where there is a residual vulnerability, which could include highlighting any identified public protection risk to local policing.

161. The PLR [CE/34 - HOM000181(Redacted PLR)] was published on GOV.UK on 5 February 2025. An unredacted copy of the PLR [CE/33 - HOM000062] has also been provided to the Inquiry.

162. To address the areas identified in the PLR, on 17 December 2024, the Home Secretary outlined reforms to further strengthen Prevent. The measures included:

- (a) Conducting an end-to-end review of Prevent thresholds, and updating policy and guidance, including on repeat referrals, to ensure they reflect the full range of threats we see today.
- (b) Broadening the interventions available to people supported by Channel – in addition to ideological mentoring, the Home Office will seek to reflect the increasingly diverse drivers of radicalisation, by exploring options to support at-risk individuals with cyber skills, family interventions, and practical mentoring.
- (c) Undertaking a strategic policy review to identify and deliver improvements in how individuals referred into Prevent who are neurodivergent or suffer from mental ill-health are supported and managed.
- (d) Strengthening the Home Office’s approach to the monitoring and oversight of referrals that do not meet Prevent thresholds, by launching a pilot to test new approaches to oversee and assure relevant cases.

163. Work is currently underway to implement all the above.

#### **Independent Prevent Commissioner report ‘Lessons for Prevent’**

164. In December 2024, the Home Secretary created the Independent Prevent Commissioner role to provide oversight and scrutiny of Prevent, increase its effectiveness, and develop insight into the Prevent system over the longer term. Lord Anderson was appointed by the Home Secretary as interim Independent Prevent Commissioner on 21 January 2025 to ensure that this scrutiny started as soon as possible. Lord Anderson was commissioned to conduct a review into Prevent and AR [CE/35 – HOM000133 (Post-Southport review into Prevent and AR: terms of reference - GOV.UK)].

165. The Home Secretary is recruiting a permanent Independent Prevent Commissioner with the specific remit of reviewing the programme’s effectiveness and identifying gaps and problems before they emerge.

166. On 16 July 2025, Lord Anderson published his report, **Lessons for Prevent [CE/36 – HOM000128 (Lessons for Prevent independent report - GOV.UK)]**, which scrutinised the murder of Sir David Amess and the Southport attack. He made 10 recommendations centred around five themes:

- (a) Prevent referrals should be considered for people that have no fixed ideology but do present a fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks;
- (b) Prevent could function better if it was connected to a broader safeguarding and violence protection system;
- (c) Prevent should rapidly adapt to the online world where so much radicalisation takes place;
- (d) Public transparency about the structures, systems and statistics of Prevent should be the default;
- (e) Information-sharing and engagement should be improved.

167. In response to Lord Anderson’s report, the Home Secretary published a written ministerial statement [**CE/37 – HOM000152 (Home Secretary Written Ministerial Statement)**] the same day detailing further improvements to Prevent:

- (a) The end-to-end review of Prevent thresholds has concluded. Its recommendations will strengthen our approach to the assessment and management of Prevent referrals. It will ensure that clear and unambiguous policy, guidance, and training is in place, so that Prevent can offer the right interventions to the right people. This guidance will clarify the policy position that those ‘fascinated with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks’ should continue to be referred to Prevent. This work will be completed by the end of September.
- (b) Continue work on how Prevent connects into wider safeguarding mechanisms to ensure no-one is overlooked.
- (c) Tackling online radicalisation through working with technology companies, like-minded international partners, and considering new approaches to identifying and supporting susceptible people online. This includes developing capabilities to better equip Prevent to manage online radicalisation risks.
- (d) Improve transparency and information sharing, including by upskilling and training Prevent practitioners, frontline workers, and civil society organisations. This work will be completed by the end of the year.

## **Future Evaluation of Prevent**

168. It is worth noting that, as with other programmes of a preventative nature (e.g. those seeking to divert young people away from knife crime), measuring success is a challenge for Prevent, particularly for those Prevent referrals provided with support via Channel interventions. Robust evidence on the effectiveness of Channel in terms of its ability to reduce the threat from radicalisation remains limited, with prior evaluations focusing on small studies using a limited range of methodologies and outcome measures.
169. There are key gaps in our understanding of the impact of Channel, including: which outcome metrics are most useful for understanding reduction in radicalisation risk; longer-term impacts of participation in Channel on beneficiaries; whether Channel effectively targets those at risk; its value for money; and unintended consequences.
170. Evaluation of the Prevent system is a priority and the Home Office commissioned in 2022 an independent long-term evaluation (conducted by Ipsos and University College London) of Channel's effectiveness to understand its impact on counter-terrorism outcomes and risk. This is a significant evaluation and will be the first of its kind in this field. The contractors have spent two years designing and testing new research tools and approaches for this evaluation since none existed that was specifically suited to the Channel cohort. The Home Office has also spent significant time working with local areas to ensure that the evaluation design is not overly burdensome for CTP and Channel panel staff focused on operational delivery. Fieldwork collecting longitudinal data from those receiving intervention through Channel started in 2025 and the evaluation is expected to report in 2026.

## **PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON PREVENT**

### **Thresholds for Prevent**

171. Reflecting on the application of thresholds across the Prevent system, it is clear there is inconsistency in approach across regions, sectors and organisations. The end-to-end Prevent Thresholds Review [**CE/16 - HOM000090 (Thresholds Review)**] was commissioned following the Southport attack and concluded in June 2025. This identified several factors that increased the risk of inconsistent application of Prevent thresholds,

notably where there are concerns around mental ill-health or neurodivergence, where other safeguarding services may already be providing support, and where ideology is unclear or not present.

172. Strengthened training, guidance and resources is required to provide greater clarity to frontline professionals considering making a referral, and to CTP and Channel panel members to support consistent decision-making. This should include resources on mental ill-health, neurodiversity and radicalisation risks, to ensure the professional judgment of practitioners is grounded in knowledge and expertise. It should also clearly stipulate that a case can be in Prevent, as well as in other safeguarding services, as Prevent is the only programme that has the remit to assess susceptibility to terrorism.
173. There is also clear inconsistency around the application of Prevent thresholds where referrals and cases do not have a clear ideology. Ideology is only one of multiple considerations when assessing an individual's susceptibility to radicalisation. Terrorists can hold a range of personal grievances and adopt ideas from different ideologies or subcultures. For some individuals, fascination with extreme violence could be an early indicator that an individual is on a pathway to terrorism.
174. The thresholds review found that the lack of a clear ideology was a significant factor in decision-making at each threshold. This often led to referrals not being made or not progressing through the Prevent system, with an overemphasis on ideology meaning that other markers for susceptibility to radicalisation could be missed. In my view, we must do more to clarify that a clear identifiable ideology is not mandatory to make or progress a Prevent referral. Prevent's aim is to intervene early to stop people from becoming terrorists and supporting terrorism, and this early intervention can and must cover cases where ideology may not be present, but radicalisation risk is a concern.

#### **How Prevent works alongside wider safeguarding services**

175. Where individuals have wider vulnerabilities, but do not meet Prevent thresholds, we need to ensure that robust processes are in place to signpost that individual to other support services and that clear assurance and accountability is in place.
176. It is a legal requirement in the CTSA 2015, that Channel panels must consider whether an individual ought to be referred to health or social care services and make appropriate

arrangements to refer this individual. Prevent has been running 'below threshold pilots' this year in 9 local authority areas to provide additional assurance where cases are signposted for non-Prevent support. In practice, we know that people are referred onwards not just to health or social care services, but to schools, local policing, and for wider local authority support.

177. Signposting to services outside of Prevent is vital to ensure a person receives the support they need, and so that risks do not escalate. This includes both the risk of harm to the individual, but also the risk that the individual themselves may cause harm to others. Whilst the pilots go some way to improving our approach, in my view we must do more to strengthen the connections and transitions between Prevent and wider safeguarding and support services. These connections must be formalised, so that referrals can be made out of Prevent with knowledge and confidence that support will be provided to stop any escalation of risk, and that concerns and vulnerabilities will be addressed appropriately.

178. Equally, where wider safeguarding and support services are working with an individual, we must make sure that they are able to raise any concerns around radicalisation risk to Prevent. Prevent is the only programme able to assess radicalisation risk and it can work alongside wider safeguarding services.

### **Prioritisation of support**

179. Finally, I wanted to reflect on how support is prioritised for those people in Channel or PLP, and for those people who are signposted out of Prevent due to the lack of radicalisation risk.

180. For those in Prevent, support is often given in the form of an intervention provider, who can address any concerning ideological views. Prevent is expanding the types of intervention available on the programme to include practical mentoring and family support. Non-ideological intervention is particularly important in supporting cases where ideology may not be present, such as those where there are 'school massacre' concerns, 'incel' concerns, or where there is a fascination with extreme violence or mass casualty attacks. In my view, we must continue to expand our intervention offer to reflect the changing nature of radicalisation.

181. Statutory Channel panel partners also play a role in identifying and putting in place wider support, including healthcare support and assessments, social care, and support around education, training and employment, as well as risk management by frontline policing. People being supported in Channel or PLP are at risk of being drawn into terrorism and potentially causing harm to others in the community. Whilst there are separate statutory provisions in place that underpin wider safeguarding and support services, I consider that these services should be taking active steps to prioritise support for Channel and PLP cases as a clear risk of potential harm to others has been identified. This would help to manage risk more effectively and redirect individuals away from terrorism, offending, and causing wider harm.
182. Where someone has been referred to Prevent and there is a risk of violence but no vulnerability to being drawn into terrorism has been identified, a person may be signposted on to another service for support. Depending on the violence risk and vulnerabilities this person holds, there is an argument that they should also receive priority support from relevant service providers, be that healthcare, social services, or risk management by local frontline policing. In my view, these support services should consider the potential that this person could cause harm to others in the community and put appropriate support in place. It is insufficient to look solely at the risk to that person, when we know a range of factors and vulnerabilities can combine to mean that person could cause harm to others.

### **YOUTH DIVERSION ORDERS (YDOS)**

183. I mentioned YDOs above. These are part of broader government action to address the challenge of young people being drawn into terrorism and are due to be introduced through the Crime and Policing Bill 2024–25 (CPB 2024–25).<sup>14</sup> YDOs are a new counter-terrorism disruption tool designed specifically to disrupt young people involved in terrorist offending at an earlier stage and divert them from the wider criminal justice system, including prosecution [**CE/38 - HOM000183 (Crime and Policing Bill: counter-**

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<sup>14</sup> Crime and Policing Bill 2024–25 (CPB 2024-25).

**terrorism and national security factsheet - GOV.UK**]. AR was eventually convicted of a terrorism offence but only following a police search of his home after the attack<sup>15</sup>.

184. Operational partners to the Home Office, including the Director General of MI5, have spoken publicly [**CE/39 – HOM000180 (MI5 Threat Update 8 October 2024)**] about the increasing numbers of young people entering the criminal justice system for terrorism-related activity. On the 5 December 2024, CTP, working with their Five Eyes counterparts (a partnership between the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States), issued a joint call to action on youth radicalisation, stressing that they are “*increasingly concerned about the radicalisation of minors, and minors who support, plan or undertake terrorist activities*” [**CE/40 – HOM000141 (Five Eyes Insights paper: Young people and violent extremism: a call for collective action)**].

185. This has also been a trend observed by the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation (IRTL), Jonathan Hall KC, who has highlighted the complexity of counter-terrorism casework involving young people in his annual reports, for example [**CE/41 – HOM000120 (The Terrorism Acts in 2023: report of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation – GOV.UK)**] to Parliament, as well as raising the significant impacts a terrorism conviction can have on young people. In the IRTL’s report on the Terrorism Acts in 2021 [**CE/42 – HOM000118 (The Terrorism Acts in 2021 report)**], he recommended that the Government consider whether a new civil diversionary order needed to be brought in to deal with this issue. In the then Government’s response, published in February 2024, [**CE/43 – HOM000121 (Response to the 2021 IRTL report)**] the former Home Secretary agreed to take forward this recommendation, highlighting that the Home Office would work with operational partners and the Ministry of Justice to review existing counter-terrorism risk management tools and consider whether a bespoke tool for young people was necessary.

186. On 17 December 2024, the Home Secretary announced an intention to bring in new YDOs in a Written Ministerial Statement [**CE/44 – HOM000083**] on preventing radicalisation. YDOs were included in the Crime and Policing Bill on introduction and the Bill is currently progressing through Parliament. YDOs build on the independent recommendation made

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<sup>15</sup> TACT, s 58

by the IRTL and will allow the police to apply to the youth or magistrates' court for a YDO where an individual is aged 21 or under, and where the following two conditions are met:

- (a) Firstly, the court must be satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the individual has committed a terrorism or terrorism-connected offence, or that the individual has been involved in conduct likely to facilitate such an offence by them or by another person.<sup>16</sup>
- (b) Secondly, the court must consider it necessary to make the YDO for the purpose of protecting the public from a risk of terrorism or other serious harm.<sup>17</sup>

187. A YDO will allow the police to impose various restrictions or requirements on a young person (insofar as each condition is assessed to be necessary, and, consistent with the requirements of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, proportionate), such as restricting the use of specific websites or limiting association with specific individuals or groups, and mandating attendance at appointments with a Prevent Intervention Provider. It would be possible for the police to consider a YDO for individuals who have been previously referred to Prevent, subject to the relevant statutory tests set out above being met.

## **MI5 INVOLVEMENT**

188. Given the Home Secretary's responsibility for oversight of the Security Service, I have specifically been asked by the Inquiry to address whether MI5 was involved with AR.

189. The Joint Assessment Team (JAT) is a triage team consisting of both CTP officers and MI5 officers. The purpose of the JAT is to provide an integrated means of CTP and MI5 triaging incoming intelligence from a range of sources. It is for CTP to determine which of their intelligence to refer to the JAT.

190. On 13 December 2019, the JAT discussed AR. The information shared by CTP with MI5, which was discussed on 13 December, is contained in CTP's JAT research document [CE/45 - CTPNW000146 (JAT)]. MI5 did not assess AR as meeting the threshold for opening

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<sup>16</sup> CPB 2024-25, cl 167 2(a).

<sup>17</sup> CPB 2024-25, cl 167 (2)(b).

an MI5 investigation. This was because there was no terrorist or domestic extremist ideology identified in the intelligence such that it would fall within MI5's statutory remit. As a result, the outcome of the discussion was that no further action would be taken by MI5. As usual, it was then for CTP to pursue any further actions that were necessary, and to bring the case back to the JAT at any time for further discussion, if required. MI5 had no further involvement with AR's case prior to the attack.

191. Post-attack, MI5 supported the police investigation, including to determine whether AR's attack was a terrorist incident. Whilst the attack constituted an act of serious violence, MI5 - having discussed the case in detail with CTP - saw no indication that AR was acting in support of any political, religious, racial or ideological cause that would fall within the definition of terrorism within section 1 of the TACT 2000.<sup>18</sup> AR's possession of a document entitled 'Military Studies in the Jihad Against the Tyrants: The Al-Qaeda Training Manual' was not, in isolation, considered to be indicative of an Islamist extremist mindset, given the wide range of violent material AR had viewed and the absence of indicators of a clear ideological motivation.

### **KNIVES AND OFFENSIVE WEAPONS**

192. I have been asked by the Inquiry to address the Home Office's involvement in measures to address knife crime, and to set out the statutory framework in relation to (i) possession of knives and other sharp and bladed articles, and (ii) sale of knives, poisons and other weapons.

193. I will first describe the Home Office's general role in relation to knife crime, and then set out the factual background in AR's case as I understand it to be. I will then explain the relevant controls over knives and other weapons as they apply to that factual background (i.e. the relevant controls on items associated with AR as they were at the date when they were purchased and at the date of the Southport attack). Poisons and explosives are dealt

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<sup>18</sup> TACT 2000, s1.

with in the next section of my statement. Lastly, I will describe the new legislation introduced since the date of the attack and further proposed reforms.

### **Role of the Home Office in relation to controls on knives and offensive weapons**

194. The Home Office is the government department with lead responsibility for the legislation and policies to tackle knife crime. The Home Office works closely with other government departments when developing and delivering the relevant policy, and brings together law enforcement, charities, local government and other important agencies when addressing knife crime. Other bodies, for example, individual police forces, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC), the College of Policing, and the CPS, have separate roles and responsibilities in the area of knives and offensive weapons controls, in terms of making operational decisions and developing police and prosecution guidance.
195. As part of its role, the Home Office has lead responsibility for legislation and policies to address the sales of knives, including sales to children and online sales.
196. The Home Office is also the lead government department regarding the legislation and policies relating to the sale of offensive weapons and the sale of other weapons such as firearms and crossbows.

### **Factual Background**

197. I understand from the Rule 9 that:
- (a) On 13 July 2024 at 20.19:44 AR made an online order for two knives from Amazon. The knives AR ordered were Apollo Chef Knife 20cm (c.8 inch), Cerbera. AR gave his details as his own name and the email address [a.megalaria7@yahoo.com](mailto:a.megalaria7@yahoo.com). The IP address associated with this activity was 104.243.213.232 (showing the use of a Virtual Private Network). One of these knives was then used in the attack;
  - (b) The shipping details were to what is now known to be AR's address and addressed to AR using an abbreviation. The telephone number provided ended \*2306.
  - (c) On 15 July 2024 at 12.06 Amazon ([shipment-tracking@amazon.co.uk](mailto:shipment-tracking@amazon.co.uk)) emailed AR (at [a.megalaria7@yahoo.com](mailto:a.megalaria7@yahoo.com)) as follows: "Hi A, Your package with 2 APOLLO Chef Knife 20cm... will be delivered today. Order # 205-

73511624218749 Track your package APOLLO Chef Knife 20cm CERBERA, Mult... Qty: 2 As your delivery includes an age- restricted item, someone over the age of 18 with a valid ID must be present to receive this package.”

- (d) Ring Camera footage shows the delivery being made on 15 July 2024 at around 17.40.16 but does not show who received the delivery; and
- (e) AR was at the time 17 years of age and it was therefore unlawful to sell the knife to him.

198. I further understand that, prior to the Southport attack, AR had previously been found with a knife in an educational setting and on a bus. AR had also made an order for a 20cm chef’s knife (for the purposes of carrying out the attack). This order was initially made and then cancelled using his own name. Thereafter, he successfully bought the knife using a VPN obscuring his IP address, as above. Between January 2022 – July 2024, he purchased a number of items that could be used for violent acts, some of which were purchased online including:

- (a) Other knives/bladed products, including two machetes, and 20cm and 14cm chef’s knives;
- (b) Other potential weapons, including a bow and arrow and a sledgehammer.

199. A search of AR’s home following the attack found the plant-derived toxin ricin and presumed components of petrol bombs (also sometimes referred to as a Molotov cocktail), as well as ingredients and paraphernalia for the purpose of manufacturing ricin. The restrictions in relation to these items are dealt with in a separate section below.

#### **Relevant Legislation Relating to Knives and Offensive Weapons Possessed by AR, as at 29 July 2024**

##### *Bladed or pointed articles: possession offences*

200. It is an offence under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (CJA 1988)<sup>19</sup> to have a bladed or pointed article in a public place without good reason or lawful authority. It is an either way offence that carries a maximum sentence of four years imprisonment if convicted on indictment.

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<sup>19</sup> CJA 1988, s.139.

201. There is a similar offence, under section 139A<sup>20</sup> of the CJA 1988, as amended by the Offensive Weapons Act 2019 (OWA 2019), if a person has a bladed or pointed article on educational premises without good reason.
202. Under section 139AA of the CJA 1988,<sup>21</sup> as amended by the OWA 2019, it is an offence to threaten someone with a bladed or pointed article or offensive weapon in a public place or on school premises. It is an either way offence that carries a maximum sentence of four years imprisonment if convicted on indictment.
203. Sections 139-139AA of the CJA 1988 apply to any article which has a blade or point except a folding pocketknife unless the cutting edge of its blade exceeds 7.62 centimetres (3 inches).<sup>22</sup>
204. There are no specific offences concerning the possession of knives or other bladed or pointed items in private. Such items are very widely available and commonly found in most households and it is accepted they have a range of legitimate purposes.
205. The exception is the offence in section 141 of the CJA 1988,<sup>23</sup> as amended by the OWA 2019, of possessing a weapon in private to which section 141 applies. The section applies to weapons listed in the relevant secondary legislation, the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988 e.g. curved swords and zombie knives. None of the weapons in AR's possession fell within this legislation.
206. I have been specifically asked by the Inquiry to set out what is meant by the term 'curved blade' under Schedule 1, paragraph 1(r) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988. An item with a curved blade will be a prohibited offensive weapon per se under s.141 of the CJA 1988 if it is a sword with a curved blade of 50 centimetres or over in length (the length of the blade shall be the straight line distance from the top of the handle to the tip of the blade). The term 'curved blade' is not defined in the legislation and carries its normal meaning. This legislation came into force in 2008 and was widely reported at the time as a "Samurai sword ban" following the use of a number of imitation

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<sup>20</sup> CJA 1988, s.139A.

<sup>21</sup> CJA 1988, s.139AA.

<sup>22</sup> CJA 1988, s.139(2)-(3).

<sup>23</sup> CJA 1988, s.141.

Samurai swords being used in offences [CE/46 – HOM000154 (12 December 2007 BBC news article ‘Ban on imitation Samurai swords’)] though it captures other swords with curved blades as well.

207. It was not therefore an offence for AR to be in possession of the bladed articles, including machetes, in private. However, it would have been an offence for him to carry the bladed articles in public without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, or other specific defence.

208. I have been asked by the Inquiry specifically to address the Restrictions of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 (the 1959 Act) and the Offensive Weapons Act 1996 (the OWA 1996). I can confirm that the 1959 Act does not relate to weapons relevant to those in AR’s possession since it relates solely to flick knives and gravity knives. The OWA 1996 introduced the offences of sale of bladed articles (at that stage to those under 16) and of possession of bladed articles on school premises, increased the penalty for the offence of carrying an offensive weapon without lawful authority or reasonable excuse, and had other effects either superseded or covered elsewhere in this statement, so do not need to be addressed separately.

*Offensive Weapons: possession offences*

209. An ‘offensive weapon’ is defined in section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 as any article made or adapted to cause injury or carried with the intention of such use.<sup>24</sup>

210. This definition could apply to someone with a sledgehammer or bow and arrow in a public place, such as the type of items possessed by AR, depending on the facts of the case. I am not aware of any evidence suggesting that AR took the sledgehammer or bow and arrows he possessed to a public place at any point.

211. It is an offence under section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 (PCA 1953)<sup>25</sup> to have an offensive weapon in a public place without reasonable excuse. It is an either way offence that carries a maximum sentence of four years imprisonment if convicted on indictment. This would not apply to the act of merely having the items in your home.

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<sup>24</sup> PCA 1953, s.1.

<sup>25</sup> PCA 1953 s.1(4).

212. It is, however, an offence under section 141(1A) of the CJA 1988<sup>26</sup> to possess certain prohibited weapons in private. The Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order and successive orders, set out the prohibited weapons to which section 141 of the 1988 Act<sup>27</sup> apply.
213. None of the weapons in AR's possession fell within the category of weapons covered by section 141 of the CJA 1988 so that it was unlawful to possess them in private.
214. In particular, whilst there is specific legislation that applies to the possession and sale of crossbows (Crossbows Act 1987),<sup>28</sup> there is no legislation that specifically applies to other types of bow (e.g. long bows), such as the bow that AR acquired. There are no similar controls on other types of bow, as other bows are generally considered to be less attractive for potential misuse than crossbows, as they require a much greater degree of skill to use, they are much more cumbersome to carry, very difficult to conceal from sight, and are unlikely to have the same ability to fire as rapidly as crossbows. This is reflected in the fact that there are very few (if any) offences that are committed by bows that are not crossbows. In the case of AR, twelve archery arrows were found, and it appears that the arrows found were not compatible with a crossbow.
215. As of 26 August 2024, there was in force a surrender and compensation scheme in relation to zombie style knives and zombie style machetes, prior to their inclusion under section 141 of the CJA 1988 Act<sup>29</sup> on 24 September 2024. This came into force as a result of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Amendment, Surrender and Compensation) Order 2024, made by the previous Government on 30 April 2024.<sup>30</sup> The ban made it illegal to possess, supply, sell, manufacture or import zombie style knives and zombie style machetes.
216. The differentiation between the treatment of zombie style machetes and other machetes was made because the zombie style version was thought to be more attractive to those who wanted to intimidate or harm. The College of Policing's 'Knife Crime – a Problem Solving Guide' [CE/47 – HOM000134 (The College of Policing's 'Knife Crime – a

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<sup>26</sup> CJA 1988, s 141(1A).

<sup>27</sup> CJA 1988, s 141.

<sup>28</sup> Crossbows Act 1987.

<sup>29</sup> CJA 1988, s 141.

<sup>30</sup> CJA 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Amendment, Surrender and Compensation) Order 2024, SI 583.

Problem Solving Guide’]] found that highly available knives (for example kitchen knives) were used disproportionately infrequently in offences compared to less available but more ‘attractive’ knives (such as zombie knives). ‘Attractiveness’ here would include both whether the knife was particularly menacing in appearance and whether it was practically suited to crime (for example, had a guard to protect a user from accidental injury). The report concluded “informed by the four A’s framework (attractiveness, availability, affordability and accessibility), we found that the attractiveness of certain knives, such as machetes, appears to outweigh the difficulties of sourcing them (availability and accessibility) or the risks of being arrested in possession of them (affordability)”. Possession of a non-zombie style machete for purposes that a police officer may reasonably consider to be for unlawful violence is, however, a potential offence and/or the machete could be seized under the Crime and Policing Bill,<sup>31</sup> should this measure complete its passage through Parliament and get Royal Assent.

### **Sale offences**

#### *Bladed or pointed articles: sale offences*

217. Under section 141A of the CJA 1988,<sup>32</sup> as amended, it is an offence to sell (i) a knife, knife blade or razor blade, (ii) an axe, or (iii) any other bladed or pointed article which is made or adapted for use for causing injury to someone under the age of 18. It is a summary offence that carries a maximum offence of six months imprisonment or a fine not exceeding level five, or both. It is a defence to this offence under section 141A(4) of the CJA 1988 if the person charged can prove they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid the commission of this offence. This defence is set out in more detail below as it relates to remote sellers.

218. Section 1 of the Knives Act 1997<sup>33</sup> relates to the unlawful marketing of knives. It is an offence to market a knife in a way which indicates or suggests that it is suitable for combat or is otherwise likely to stimulate or encourage violent behaviour involving the use of the knife as a weapon. On summary conviction, a person who is found guilty is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months or to a fine not exceeding the statutory

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<sup>31</sup> CPB 2024–25, cl 27 and 29.

<sup>32</sup> CJA 1988, s141A.

<sup>33</sup> Knives Act 1997 s 1.

maximum, or to both. On conviction on indictment, a person guilty is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years, or to a fine, or to both.

219. Defences apply to this offence. Under section 3 of the Knives Act 1997 it is a defence if the person charged can prove: (i) the knife was marketed for use by armed forces of any country, as an antique or curio, or as falling within such other category as prescribed; (ii) it was reasonable for the knife to be marketed in that way; and (iii) there were no reasonable grounds for suspecting that a person whose possession the knife might come in consequence of the way in which it was marketed would use it for an unlawful purpose.<sup>34</sup> Other defences are contained in section 4 of the Knives Act.<sup>35</sup>

*Provisions for defences for remote sellers*

220. Section 141B of the CJA 1988,<sup>36</sup> as amended by the OWA 2019, makes specific provision for limitations to the defence in section 141A (4) of the CJA 1988<sup>37</sup> (sale of knives to a person under the age of 18), if it involves a remote seller (such as an online seller). The defence in section 141A of the CJA 1988 only applies where specific conditions are met by the seller.

221. The conditions in summary are:

- (a) The seller had a system for checking that the purchaser was not under the age of 18 and the system was likely to prevent someone under 18 buying such items.
- (b) The package containing the article despatched by the seller was clearly labelled as containing such an article; and that when finally delivered, it should only be delivered into the hands of someone aged 18 years or older.
- (c) The seller took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to ensure that, when finally delivered, the package would be delivered into the hands of someone aged 18 years or older.
- (d) The package was not delivered, or arranged to be delivered, to a locker.

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<sup>34</sup> Knives Act 1997, s 3.

<sup>35</sup> Knives Act 1997, s 4

<sup>36</sup> CJA 1988, s141B.

<sup>37</sup> CJA 1988 s141A(4).

222. It is ultimately for remote sellers to devise and put in place a system which would provide a defence under section 141A(4) of the CJA 1988 and for the Courts to determine whether the defence is established. However, statutory guidance was issued in April 2022 by the Home Secretary, which provided guidance on the measures in the OWA 2019 [**CE/48 – HOM000143 (Statutory guidance: Offensive Weapons Act 2019 - GOV.UK)**]. This included the measures on remote sales. The Statutory Guidance says that it for the seller to determine what age verification system should be put in place, and that it is ultimately for the courts to determine whether the seller has put in place an adequate system, taking into account the particular facts in individual cases. However, the Statutory Guidance does give examples of systems which it says are unlikely to support as adequate system of checks. The examples it gives are: relying on tick boxes that the purchaser is over 18; any other reliance on only information given by the buyer that they are over 18 without additional checks; and payment systems that may require the customer to be over 18 but which do not verify age at the point of purchase.

223. I have been asked what specific safeguards are to be put in place by retailers in relation to the use of false details, false documents, or the use of VPNs in online purchases, and in relation to the use of false details or documents at the point of delivery. Although, as above, the Act does not prescribe any specific method by which retailers must comply with their obligations, further assistance is given via resources such as:

(a) The National Business Crime Centre (NBCC) offers a knife retailers toolkit (which includes training for delivery drivers). The NBCC website also flags queries that retailers and couriers may have to the Metropolitan Police Business Crime Hub who are able to assist in ensuring that such organisations are compliant.

(b) Business Companion is a Government backed website providing free guidance on Trading Standards law and it also has a section on knife sales, which provides guidance, for example, regarding online age-verification software which includes checks include using the electoral register and/or credit reference agencies The guidance notes that a Publicly Available Specification (PAS) has been published, which was developed by the Digital Policy Alliance and BSI (British Standards Institution) (PAS 1296: Online age checking. Provision and use of online age check services). This voluntary Code of Practice is designed to help traders, particularly those that conduct age checks or provide age check services, to

comply with the law. The Business Companion guidance also gives guidance on labelling.

224. The Home Office is reforming the law as set out below so that at the point of purchase, online sellers of knives and crossbows will be required to check a photographic identity document (either a passport or a UK driving licence), and a current photograph of the buyer used to demonstrate that they are the holder of the photographic identity document, and at the point of delivery, the courier must check the photographic identification document provided by the person receiving the package to demonstrate that they are aged 18 or over and that they are the buyer.

*Offence of delivery of a bladed product to a residential address*

225. The OWA 2019 introduced specific measures for knife offences, in particular strengthening age verification requirements and stopping certain knives (those more capable of causing injury to the skin of a person, described in the legislation as ‘bladed products’ – section 41 contains the definition)<sup>38</sup> being delivered to residential addresses after they are bought online, unless the seller has arrangements in place with the delivery company to ensure that the product would not be delivered into the hands of a person under 18.

226. Section 38 of the OWA 2019<sup>39</sup> created an offence on the part of the seller delivering or arranging to deliver a bladed product to a residential address following a remote sale. Section 39 of the OWA 2019,<sup>40</sup> created an offence on the part of the person with whom the seller has arranged to make the delivery, to deliver a bladed product to a person under 18. In these circumstances, an offence is committed when the final delivery of the bladed product is not delivered into the hands of a person aged 18 years or older. The seller may have a defence if they entered into an arrangement requiring the person with whom it was made to have procedures in place to ensure the bladed product was delivered into the hands of a person 18 or over. It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under sections 38 or 39 to prove that they took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid the commission of the offence.

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<sup>38</sup> OWA 2019, s 41.

<sup>39</sup> OWA 2019, s 38.

<sup>40</sup> OWA 2019, s 39.

227. As set out in more detail below, the Government has introduced provisions in the Crime and Policing Bill, currently going through Parliament, so that knives bought online can only be delivered to the person who purchased the knife, having recognised that this was a deficiency in the existing legislation.

### **Other weapons – sale offences**

228. It is an offence under section 141 of the CJA 1988<sup>41</sup> to sell an offensive weapon, as listed in schedule 1 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988.

229. There is specific legislation that applies to the possession, sale and letting on hire of crossbows (Crossbows Act 1987<sup>42</sup>) but there is no legislation that specifically applies to other types of bow (e.g. long bow), such as the bow that AR acquired.

230. Crossbows are subject to statutory controls by virtue of the Crossbows Act 1987. Section 1 of that Act makes it an offence to sell or let on hire a crossbow, with a draw weight of 1.4 kilograms or greater, to persons under the age of 18 in England, Wales and Scotland. Similar legislation is in place in Northern Ireland. Under section 2 of the Crossbows Act 1987 it is prohibited for persons aged under 18 to buy or hire a crossbow. Under Section 3, persons under the age of 18 are prohibited from possessing a crossbow which is capable of discharging a missile or parts of a crossbow which together (and without any other parts) can be assembled to form a crossbow capable of discharging a missile, unless supervised by someone aged 21 or over. The Act, under section 4, also allows the police to search individuals that they have reason to believe are in unlawful possession of a crossbow.

231. The maximum penalty for the sale or hire of a crossbow is six months' imprisonment or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or both on summary conviction.<sup>43</sup> The maximum penalty for the purchase, hire or possession of crossbows by under 18s is a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

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<sup>41</sup> CJA 1988, s 141.

<sup>42</sup> Crossbows Act 1987.

<sup>43</sup> Crossbows Act 1987, s 6.

232. I have been asked specifically to comment on the Firearms Act 1968, but the provisions of the Firearms Act are not relevant to the items in AR's possession.

### **Knife Crime Prevention and Enforcement**

233. In terms of work led by the Home Office to tackle knife crime and youth violence, successive governments have introduced new strategies and programmes aimed at doing so over the last ten years. In November 2011, the then Government introduced the Ending Gang and Youth Violence (EGYV) programme [**CE/49 – HOM000145 (Ending gang and youth violence: cross-government report - GOV.UK)**], aimed at tackling the growth of gang and youth violence in some cities. This followed concern about the role of street gangs in the riots seen in some areas in summer 2011. It was a cross-departmental approach that sought to provide support to the worst affected local areas and brought together local agencies to tackle youth violence problems associated with gangs. The programme was then superseded in January 2016 by the Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation (EGVE) programme [**CE/50 – HOM000163 (EGVE)**]. This was a refreshed programme that remained cross-departmental and aimed at building resilience in local areas and working closely with local agencies. However, the new title reflected the growing concern about the role of county lines drugs supply in both street violence and the exploitation of vulnerable young people and adults. The priority areas for the programme were: tackling county lines; reducing violence, including knife crime; safeguarding; supporting early intervention based on the best evidence; and providing meaningful alternatives to criminality.

234. In April 2018, following increases in homicide, knife crime and gun crime (as measured by police recorded crime and hospital admissions), the Government published the Serious Violence Strategy [**CE/51 – HOM000144 (Serious Violence Strategy policy paper)**]. The Serious Violence Strategy was a cross-government approach focused on early intervention and prevention, tackling county lines, supporting communities and local partnerships, and a strong law enforcement and criminal justice response. In particular, the strategy emphasised the importance of early intervention and prevention to intervene with young people at risk before they become involved in violence. The strategy, and the structures and principles it put in place, led to the introduction of Violence Reduction Units (see **CE/52 – HOM000122 (Research and Analysis Paper on Violence Reduction Units)** which also sets out brief background to their introduction), the National County Lines Coordination Centre [**CE/53 – HOM000155 (National County Lines Coordination**

**Centre to crack down on drug gangs - GOV.UK**], the Serious Violence Duty [**CE/54 - HOM000177 (Serious Violence Duty - GOV.UK)**] and the formation of the new Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) [**CE/55 – HOM000132 (Charity chosen to deliver £200m Youth Endowment Fund to tackle violence - GOV.UK)**] over the years that followed the publication of the strategy).

235. In July 2021, the Home Office Beating Crime Plan [**CE/56 – HOM000126 (Beating crime plan policy paper - GOV.UK)**] articulated a strategic commitment to reduce the most harmful forms of criminality, with knife crime and serious violence identified as priority areas due to their significant and enduring impact on public safety and community confidence. These offences were recognised as requiring a comprehensive and coordinated response, prompting the development of a framework that integrated enforcement, prevention, and multi-agency partnership working to address the root causes and consequences of violence. In pursuit of this objective, the previous Government aimed to reduce homicide, serious violence, and neighbourhood crime by 20% by 2024, benchmarked against 2019 levels.

236. The Serious Violence Duty was also introduced by legislation to place a statutory requirement on police, health, education and other agencies to collaborate in the prevention of serious violence through the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Act 2022,<sup>44</sup> thereby embedding a joined-up and locally responsive approach. The PCSC Act also included Serious Violence Reduction Orders and new Offensive Weapon Homicide Reviews. To further support police activity in reaching the 20% reduction target, the Home Office launched the first ever Homicide Prevention Fund in 2022 to invest in new and innovative police activity to prevent homicides [**CE/57 – HOM000174 (Homicide Prevention Fund - Contracts Finder)**]. Additionally, the Home Office led on the Winter Homicide Prevention Initiative which took place December 2023 – February 2024 and focused on preventing homicides of over 25-year-old males killed in a public space. This included a national communications campaign led by Leicestershire Police (on behalf of the NPCC) and one-off grants to six local police forces to fund local homicide prevention activities during that period.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the Home Office led on the Winter Homicide Prevention Initiative which took place December 2023 – February 2024 and focused on

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<sup>44</sup> Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022.

<sup>45</sup> Knives or sharp instruments have been the most common weapons used in homicide over the last 40 years.

preventing homicides of over 25-year-old males killed in a public space. This included a national communications campaign led by Leicestershire Police (on behalf of the NPCC) and one-off grants to six local police forces to fund local homicide prevention activities during that period.

237. In so far as there is an overlap between knife crime and drug offences, in 2021, the previous Government also published its 10-year drug strategy, 'From Harm to Hope' setting out its plan to combat illegal drugs. While a cross-government strategy, the Home Office led on the 'breaking supply chains' element of the strategy with a focus on rolling up county lines to reduce violence and homicide associated with drug supply – almost half of all homicides in England and Wales were recorded to be drug-related. The strategy committed £145 million of funding to the County Lines Programme in the first three years of the strategy, which built on over £65m invested since 2019.

238. The Serious and Organised Crime Strategies (2018) and (2023) further underpinned efforts to tackle knife crime and serious violence by targeting the organised criminal networks that drive drug markets, exploitation and violence, through a strengthened multi-agency response led by the National Crime Agency, Regional Organised Crime Units and local police.

239. Enforcement of the offences set out above on knives, offensive weapons and crossbows falls to police forces. The Home Office is, however, aware of work undertaken by others in this area: for example, in 2021, the College of Policing and NPCC published 'Knife crime – A problem solving guide', a toolkit to assist police in recognition of the fact that knife crime had risen in recent years and tackling it must be one of policing's top priorities [**CE/47 – HOM000134 (The College of Policing's 'Knife Crime – a Problem Solving Guide')**]. In 2022, the Guidelines on the Cautioning and Charging of Knife Crime Offences (which included children and those who had previously committed a knife offence), were updated by the NPCC, College of Policing and CPS and circulated to police forces and prosecutors [**CE/58 – HOM000176 (Guidelines on the Cautioning and Charging of Knife Crime Offences)**].

240. The Government also collects statistics on knife crime, as set out below.

241. The Home Office is aware that Trading Standards and the police have carried out enforcement activity targeting online sellers of knives. The Home Office also publishes

the voluntary agreement with major retailers, which was first published in 2016 and revised following the passing of the OWA 2019 [CE/58a – HOM000185 (Home Office Policy Paper ‘Sale of Knives: Voluntary Agreement by Retailers’ updated July 2024)]. Under that agreement it is recorded that ebay is committed to a safe online marketplace and currently prohibits the sale of all knives on ebay.co.uk, with the exception of cutlery. Amazon requires that all third-party sellers on its marketplace comply with the law on the sale of knives, including clearly listing products as for over 18s and requiring age verification on delivery. Those who do not are subject to action including potential suspension.

242. Trading Standards are the local authority departments which traditionally have responsibility for enforcing consumer protection legislation. Trading Standards authorities enforce the law on the sale of knives by retailers in their local area and will, for example, conduct test purchase operations to check if sales of knives are compliant with age restrictions, although their focus tends to be on ‘bricks and mortar shops’ in the local authority area. Trading Standards are the enforcement agency for the sales and delivery provisions for corrosive products in the OWA 2019,<sup>46</sup> and activities include awareness raising and compliance visits, conducting regular test purchasing operations and follow-up actions, investigations and prosecutions of sellers and delivery companies who fail any test purchasing operations.

243. I address some of these measures taken by previous Governments summarised in the paragraphs above in further detail below, and also explain the measures that have been undertaken by the present Government, post the Southport attack.

### **Stop and Search**

244. Stop and search is a key tactic for police to take dangerous weapons off the streets and protect communities from violence and other crime. Between 2019 and 2023, 100,000 weapons were removed from the streets, 40,000 of those specifically seized through stop and search, also leading to over 220,000 arrests [CE/59 – HOM000137 (Home Office Fact Sheet on Police Powers: Stop and Search June 2023)].

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<sup>46</sup> Offensive Weapons Act 2019, s 64.

245. Under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984,<sup>47</sup> a police constable may stop, detain, and search any person or vehicle in a public place, as long as the officer has 'reasonable grounds' for suspecting that they will find stolen or prohibited articles, such as a bladed article.
246. Under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994,<sup>48</sup> upon authorisation from a police officer at or above the rank of inspector, a constable can conduct searches of any pedestrian or vehicle for offensive weapons or dangerous instruments in the locality, without the need for reasonable grounds. Such authorisation can be given if the Inspector believes (inter alia) that incidents involving serious violence may take place in the locality in his police area, and it is expedient to make such an order, or that that persons are carrying dangerous instruments or offensive weapons in any locality in his police area without good reason.
247. Serious Violence Reduction Orders (SVROs) were introduced under sections 165 to 166 of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022<sup>49</sup> and were piloted for two years between April 2023 and April 2025 in four areas of the country – Thames Valley, West Midlands, Merseyside and Sussex. These Orders give the police powers to search those previously convicted of weapons offences, to deter them from carrying knives again while ensuring that those who persist are more likely to be caught. The Home Office provided statutory guidance in relation to SVROs in March 2023 [**CE/60 – HOM000127 (SVRO Statutory Guidance)**]. The results of the pilot scheme are currently being evaluated.
248. In conducting any stop and search, police must adhere to strict safeguards that ensure the dignity of the individual they are stopping and searching and enhance public trust.
249. I have been asked to provide a view as to the effectiveness of the use of stop and search by police. Evidence suggests that stop and search has a low-to-moderate impact on violent crime, but it is unclear to what extent that impact is a result of deterrence due to police presence rather than the use of the power itself. The use of the power is also associated with potential harms on individuals who are stopped and searched, including poorer mental and physical health and more negative attitudes towards the police (See:

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<sup>47</sup> Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, s 1.

<sup>48</sup> Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, s 60.

<sup>49</sup> Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, ss 165 – 166.

[CE/61 – HOM000156 (Petersen, et al, 'Police stops to reduce crime: A systematic review and meta-analysis' (2023)); [CE/62 - HOM000130 (Youth Endowment Fund – Toolkit: Stop and search)] and [(CE/63 – HOM000139 (College of Policing: Developing Interventions to reduce knife crime))].

250. Some stakeholders have suggested that officers may lack confidence to use their stop and search powers, for a range of reasons. This may be due to the relative inexperience of the current police workforce. The College of Policing sets the professional standards for police in England and Wales, including in relation to stop and search. It also publishes Authorised Professional Practice guidance on the use of powers.
251. The use of stop and search and the way in which it is conducted is principally an operational matter for police forces. However, Government has sought to enhance its effectiveness in relation to knife offences through the SVRO pilot, which is currently being evaluated (discussed above).

#### **Changes Since 29 July 2024**

##### *Overview*

252. The current government has committed to halve knife crime in a decade, by 2034. This ambition has been embedded across Home Office policy and programme delivery and is supported by a comprehensive delivery plan that has included hotspot targeting, continuation of Violence Reduction Units and the County Lines Programme, youth-focused interventions, and cross-government coordination.
253. As part of its operational response to rising levels of knife-enabled robbery, the Home Office established the Knife-Enabled Robbery (KER) Taskforce. This initiative was designed to support the seven police force areas with the highest volumes of knife-enabled robbery (the Metropolitan Police Service, Greater Manchester Police, West Midlands Police, West Yorkshire Police, South Yorkshire Police, Avon & Somerset Police and British Transport Police), to deploy enhanced enforcement, intelligence-led interventions, and coordinated support to disrupt offending. The Taskforce set, met, and then exceeded, a stretching ambition to 'halt the rise' in KER across these areas. Offence levels returned to the June 2024 baseline in just 5 months. These same areas are now

(year ending June 2025) achieving -6% reductions in KER offending compared to June 2024 [**CE/64 – HOM000119 (Police data on knife enabled robbery August 2021)**].

254. To strengthen accountability and ensure community voices are central to policy development, the Government established the Knife Crime Coalition [**CE/65 – HOM000175 (Government announcement Knife Crime Coalition September 2024)**]. This group brings together bereaved families, campaigners, practitioners and experts to advise ministers, shape delivery, and scrutinise progress against the government's commitment to halve knife crime. The coalition meets regularly and plays a key role in informing the strategic direction.
255. In support of this wider strategy, legislative measures have been introduced through the Crime and Policing Bill<sup>50</sup> including Ronan's Law [**CE/66 - HOM000125 (Government announcement on Ronan's Law February 2025)**] which together represent a significant strengthening of the legal framework surrounding knife crime. These reforms included the new offence of possession of a knife for unlawful violence (and a new seizure power for the police), the introduction of stricter age verification requirements for online knife sales, and the imposition of sanctions on technology executives who failed to remove illegal knife-related content. A new offence of criminal exploitation of children was also created to address the grooming and coercion of young people into knife-related criminal activity, reflecting growing concern about the role of exploitation in perpetuating violence. These measures are explained in more detail below. In addition, bans on ninja swords and zombie knives have been introduced separately.
256. To complement these enforcement and legislative measures, the Young Futures Programme [**CE/67 – HOM000157 (No.10 Press Release launch of Young Futures Hub July 2025)**] was launched to provide early support to vulnerable teenagers through a network of Young Futures Hubs and Prevention Partnerships. The programme forms a key part of the government's long-term strategy to reduce knife crime and serious violence, and supports the broader ambition to deliver sustained reductions in harm and improved safety in communities most affected by violence.

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<sup>50</sup> CPB 2024–25, cl 167 2(a).

257. I have been specifically asked whether the Home Office considers that the police should have stronger powers in relation to the carriage and use of knives. The Home Office keeps this under close review. The SVRO pilot scheme is currently being evaluated. The Crime and Policing Bill contains new measures concerning the possession of knives for unlawful violence, and this includes possession in private, as a result of police concerns. The Home Office would consider and respond to any further request by police forces for additional powers. The Home Office is not aware of any widespread concern among police forces that they have insufficient powers and save as above, and subject to the result of any ongoing reviews as above, does not currently propose to increase police powers in this area.

#### *Review of Online Sales of Knives*

258. On 27 September 2024, the Home Office Minister for Policing and Crime Prevention, Dame Diana Johnson MP, wrote to Commander Stephen Clayman of the Metropolitan Police, in his role as the National Police Chiefs' Council lead on knife crime **[CE/67a – HOM000096]**. This was to instigate a Review of Online Sales of Knives, which was a Government manifesto commitment made at the 2024 General Election in response to broad concerns about under 18s buying weapons online and published prior to the Southport attack. In addition to the manifesto commitment, the Home Office had also identified the need to further tighten the law on online sales of knives in respect of age verification and delivery. The law needed to be updated to reflect and anticipate how the public were buying items such as knives online. It was unlikely that a ban on online sales of knives would be tolerable to many members of the public, and it could have been seen as discriminatory for example to the physically disabled who were unable to visit a shop easily. The challenge is therefore to allow the legitimate online market, but have controls strong enough to prevent underage sales of knives online or the sale of illegal knives online.

259. The review was conducted over a three-month period and was led by Commander Clayman. The review reported to the Home Secretary and was published on 19 February 2025 **[CE/68 – HOM000160 (Clayman Review of Online Sale of Knives)]**. The review assessed checks on age verification at both point of sale and point of delivery. In relation to the former, it noted that in a 2019/20 Trading Standards review only 3% of transactions failed an age verification process at the point of sale, though there were a number of

caveats in relation to that data. The review stated that it was harder to carry out robust age verification checks at point of delivery. The review made recommendations for changes in legislation and process in respect of the online sale and delivery of knives including stronger age checks, online sellers reporting bulk purchases of knives to the police and introducing a registration scheme for sellers of knives.

260. The Government brought forward amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill to introduce stronger age verification of online sales and delivery of knives and requiring online retailers to report bulk purchases of knives (see below). The Government also committed to a consultation on a registration scheme for sellers of knives. The other recommendations, including those relating to imports and border checks, continue to be under active consideration and work is continuing in the Home Office to assess or implement these recommendations.

#### *New Legislation on Knives and Offensive Weapons: Crime and Policing Bill*

##### Online Sales of Knives

261. The Home Secretary announced on 28 January 2025 that the Government would be legislating to introduce specific age, and identification, checks for remote sales and delivery of knives in the forthcoming Crime and Policing Bill. The need for such legislation was a recommendation in the Review of Online Sales of Knives, and ahead of the Review's publication, an early announcement about the introduction of specific age and identification checks was made as a direct response to the concern about online sales and delivery of knives following the case of AR. The changes since introduced by the Government are set out below, but the Government recognises that more needs to be done to tackle knife crime and achieve its aim of halving knife crime in a decade.

262. The Government continues actively to consider the potential for further changes in this area looking at the best evidence and data available, as well as listening to the concerns and points raised by policing, parliamentarians, and campaigners. For example, following a campaign being launched by a survivor of the Southport attack, we are currently looking at whether the public should be encouraged to consider rounded tipped kitchen knives as an alternative to sharp-pointed knives and if this would reduce the number of serious offences where a kitchen knife has been used. The Home Office is currently talking to a number of retailers and manufacturers about how best to take this forward. The Government also held an extended knife surrender campaign in July 2025, in parallel with

the ninja sword surrender and compensation scheme (see below). This was in response to concerns expressed by families of victims and campaign groups that a surrender scheme would be too narrow and not engage communities. The Home Office therefore introduced 37 specially designed knife surrender bins at locations throughout Greater London, as well as locations in the West Midlands and Greater Manchester. The extended surrender campaign was also supported by the use of a mobile surrender van, specially designed to receive knives and swords safely, and this initiative was well received by police forces, campaigners and local communities.

#### Offensive Weapon or Bladed Article Possession Offence and Power of Seizure

263. On 25 February 2025, the Government published the Crime and Policing Bill on its introduction to the House of Commons and ahead of its Second Reading on 10 March 2025. The Bill, on introduction, included the new offence of possession of a bladed article or offensive weapon with intent to use unlawful violence and the new police power to seize a bladed article if there are reasonable grounds to suspect it would likely to be used in unlawful violence.<sup>51</sup> The proposed new offence applies to knives and offensive weapons held whether in public or private. The proposed new power applies to bladed articles only, held on any premises.

#### Increase in maximum penalties for sale and possession

264. The Bill also increases the maximum penalties for selling prohibited weapons, possession of offensive weapons in public, private possession of prohibited weapons, and selling knives and other bladed and pointed articles to those aged under 18. It is proposed that these offences become either way offences with a maximum custodial sentence of two years on conviction on indictment.<sup>52</sup>

#### New requirements on sellers, retailer and measures targeting illegal online content

265. New measures were brought forward in May 2025, as amendments to the Crime and Policing Bill at the Committee Stage in the House of Commons. The measures included: the age and identification checks for online sales and delivery of knives; the requirement on retailers to report bulk purchases online of knives; and a new content removal regime for illegal knife related content and fines for technology companies and senior executives

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<sup>51</sup> CPB 2024–25, cl 27 and 29.

<sup>52</sup> CPB 2024–25, cl 28.

who fail to take action to remove such material from online platforms and marketplaces. The Government has produced a factsheet setting out the current proposed reforms in the Crime and Policing Bill insofar as they relate to knife crime **[CE/69 – HOM000123 (Crime and Policing Bill: Knife Crime and Crossbows Factsheet)]**. As set out above, the first two measures had already been announced earlier in 2025, and the measures on online content and the liability of technology companies and their senior executives had been subject to consultation launched on 13 November 2024. The Government response was published on 24 April 2025.

266. The Government is also providing £1.75m funding in 2025/2026 to support a pilot for a new national police coordination unit to tackle the online sale of knives. This unit will be dedicated to coordinated investigations into all aspects of online unlawful knife and offensive weapons sales and bringing those responsible to justice. The unit will also look to improve the data collection and analysis capability to expand police understanding of the knife crime problem and how enforcement activities can be best targeted.<sup>53</sup>

#### New measures on ninja swords and crossbows

267. The Government also added ninja swords to the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988 and this change was approved by Parliament in June 2025.<sup>54</sup> (The legal description to be used for banning ninja swords was subject to a consultation launched on 13 November 2024. The Government response was published on 27 March 2025.) The swords became prohibited from 1 August 2025. The Ninja Sword Surrender and Compensation Scheme started on 1 July and allowed those who own these weapons to surrender them to the police and claim compensation prior to the prohibition coming into force on 1 August 2025.

268. While violent incidents involving crossbows are relatively rare, the Government has been looking at the evidence as to whether the existing controls on crossbows should be strengthened to better protect the public. This includes looking at the responses to the call for evidence by the Home Office, which ran from 14 February to 9 April 2024, which tested ideas on possible different forms of licensing in respect of the use, ownership and supply of crossbows. The responses have been reviewed, and the Government will

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<sup>53</sup> CPB 2024–25.

<sup>54</sup> Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) Order 1988.

publish its response to the call for evidence shortly which will set out the next steps the Government intends to take.

269. Amendments relating to the sale and letting on hire of crossbows were made to the Crime and Policing Bill in May 2025.<sup>55</sup> This introduced specific age, and identification checks for online sales and letting on hire of crossbows similar to the measures introduced for knives.

### **Mandatory referrals to Youth Offending Teams for knife possession offences by under-18s**

270. Additional Government action to respond to knife possession offences by under-18s includes ensuring that every young person caught in possession of a knife is referred to a Youth Offending Team and receives a mandatory plan to prevent reoffending. In 2022, the NPCC and the CPS issued guidelines on the cautioning and charging of knife crime offences (including knife possession offences), as I have explained above. The Home Office and the Ministry of Justice are working with partners to develop new government guidance to support police, Youth Offending Teams and other agencies in addressing knife possession offences by under-18s. This guidance will help ensure that police notify Youth Offending Teams of every such incident. This will enable timely and tailored evidence-based interventions to be delivered by Youth Offending Teams promptly and effectively. Mental health issues would be reviewed as part of the work done by Youth Offending Teams with the young people referred to them.

### **Knife Crime Prevention Orders**

271. Knife Crime Prevention Orders (KCPOs) were introduced in Part 2 of the OWA 2019.<sup>56</sup> They were introduced on the basis that they would be piloted before any decision was made on a wider roll-out. KCPOs were brought forward in response to police concerns that there was a gap in police powers to manage the risks of knife offending in the community and to help divert those who were at risk of being drawn into knife crime. An explanation of the scope of KCPOs could be found in the Practitioners' Guidance published by the Home Office in 2021 [**CE/70 – HOM000161 (KCPO Practitioners Guide July 2021)**].

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<sup>55</sup> CPB 2024–25.

<sup>56</sup> OWA 2019, Pt 2.

272. KCPOs were civil orders that enabled courts to impose prohibitions and requirements on individuals convicted of an offence involving violence or where a bladed article was used or carried in the commission of the offence, or where individuals have **not** been convicted of an offence but there was evidence that they have had a bladed article with them on two or more occasions and they posed a risk of harm or offending involving a bladed article. Along with prohibitions, KCPOs could include positive requirements to require individuals to deal with the underlying causes of their behaviour. This could include targeted intervention programmes, mentoring and sports. The intention of KCPOs was to be preventative and not punitive. KCPOs could last for between six-months and two-years. Orders needed to be reviewed by the courts after 12 months. KCPOs issued to under 18s were subject to more regular reviews.

273. The previous Government decided not to roll out KCPOs after careful consideration of the 21-month long pilot of the orders in the Metropolitan Police area, which ended in March 2023. Whilst the evaluation of the pilot showed there was evidence of positive outcomes from some requirements placed on individuals, it was concluded that there was not enough evidence to show that KCPOs had sufficient impact to support rolling out the orders nationally.

274. The decision was communicated in March 2024 by emails from the Home Office to partners involved in the pilot including the Metropolitan Police, the CPS, the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's Office, HMCTS and the Youth Justice Board. There was no report published on the pilot. However, the Metropolitan Police has since released the evaluation following Freedom of Information (FOI) requests **[CE/71 – HOM000173 (Metropolitan Police FOI Response Ref: 01/FOI/24/038993/L on Evaluation of Knife Crime Prevention Orders); CE/72 – HOM000087 (University College London Summary on Knife Crime Prevention Order Implementation); CE/73 – HOM000085 (Metropolitan Police Knife Crime Prevention Order Impact Evaluation)]**.

#### **Statistical Trends relating to knife crime**

275. I have been asked to explain any statistical trends that the Home Office is aware of for injuries caused by assaults involving knives and offences relating to knives.

276. Knife-enabled crime recorded by the police decreased by 1% in the year ending (YE) March 2025 (to 53,047 offences), compared with YE March 2024 (53,685 offences). This was 4% lower than YE March 2020 (55,170 offences).
277. Most knife-enabled crimes were assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm (43%) and robbery (42%) offences. Fewer than 1% of knife-enabled crimes were homicide offences (0.4%). Knife-enabled homicide fell by 23% (to 204 offences) compared with the previous year (265 offences).
278. Tables showing the trends in this data are included at Annex B.
279. In addition to police recorded crime data above, data collected by NHS on admission to hospital for injuries caused by an assault with a sharp object are included below.
280. The latest provisional admissions data for NHS hospitals in England and Wales showed a 10% decrease in the number of admissions for assault by a sharp object in YE March 2025 (to 3,508 admissions). This was 26% below YE March 2020 (4,769 admissions).
281. Separate data is recorded by police on possession of an article with a blade or point.
282. Police recorded "possession of article with a blade or point" offences increased by 2% in YE March 2025 (28,314 offences), compared with YE March 2024 (27,646 offences).
283. Trends in possession offences are likely to be influenced by police activity and operations, particularly stop and search.
284. I am aware of Ministry of Justice statistics relating to sentencing for possession of knives and offensive weapons. These recorded that the overall number of knife and offensive weapon offences dealt with by the Criminal Justice System increased to 20,754 in the year ending March 2025. This represented a 4.4% increase compared to the year ending March 2024 and an increase of 26.2% over the last decade [**CE/74 – HOM000162 (MOJ Knife and Offensive Weapon Sentencing Statistics January – March 2025)**].
285. The MoJ publishes statistics in relation to offences committed by children, including offences for which children received cautions or sentences for possession of an article with a blade or point, possession of an offensive weapon, or threatening with either type

of weapon. In the year ending March 2024, there were just over 3,200 knife or offensive weapon offences committed by children resulting in a caution or sentence, which is 6% fewer than the previous year but 20% greater than 10 years ago. This is the sixth consecutive year-on-year decrease [**CE/75 – HOM000159 (Youth Justice Statistics 2023 – 2024)**].

### **Statistical tables in relation to stop and search**

286. The Government maintains accredited statistics on Stop and Search. The data shows that 15.9% of stop and searches in the year to end March 2024 were in relation to searching for offensive weapons, and in 12.0% of those cases an offensive weapon was found. 17.1% of searches for offensive weapons led to an arrest for offensive weapons or another offence [**CE/76 – HOM000151 (Accredited statistics on police powers including stop and search March 2024)**]. Statistics for stop and search are also set out in more detail in Annex B.
287. In terms of statistical trends, between 2009/10 and 2023/24, the number of stop and searches for offensive weapons fell by 30%, from 120,764 to 84,444.
288. From 2009/10 to 2016/17, searches dropped by 73%, reaching 32,860, just over a quarter of the initial figure. This period reflects the most significant sustained decline.
289. Volumes of stop and searches (including knife searches) fell significantly between 2010/11 and 2016/17.
290. Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, searches increased by 178%, climbing to 91,491. This brought volumes back to levels comparable with 2011/12, indicating a marked shift in activity.
291. From 2019/20 to 2023/24, search volumes stabilised, with a modest 8% decrease over four years. The total in 2023/24 stood at 84,444 searches.
292. Overall volumes of stop and search are determined by operational policing decisions about how to deploy the power. Volumes of stop and search peaked in 2009/10, declined

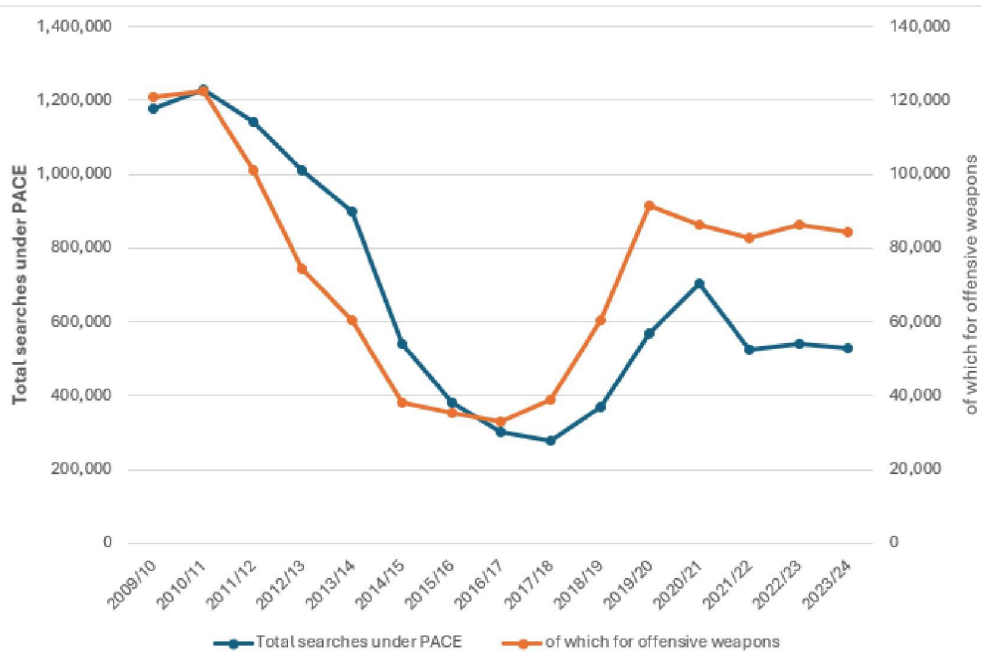
significantly until 2016/17, and have subsequently risen somewhat. The reasons for these trends are likely to be complex and any explanation will be partly speculative.

293. However, national factors which may have influenced operational behaviour include the reduction in police officer numbers during the 2010s and subsequent Police Uplift Programme of recruitment; as well as the introduction of the Best Use of Stop and Search Scheme in 2014 and its subsequent partial withdrawal from 2019.

**Stop and searches for offensive weapons, England and Wales, 2009/10 to 2023/24**

| <b>Financial year</b> | <b>Number of stop and searches for offensive weapons, England and Wales</b> | <b>Proportion of searches under PACE</b> |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| 2009/10               | 120,764   | 10.3%                                    |
| 2010/11               | 122,523   | 10.0%                                    |
| 2011/12               | 101,212   | 8.9%                                     |
| 2012/13               | 74,369  | 7.3%                                     |
| 2013/14               | 60,630  | 6.7%                                     |
| 2014/15               | 38,175  | 7.1%                                     |
| 2015/16               | 35,573  | 9.3%                                     |
| 2016/17               | 32,860  | 10.8%                                    |
| 2017/18               | 39,050  | 14.0%                                    |
| 2018/19               | 60,286  | 16.2%                                    |
| 2019/20               | 91,491  | 16.1%                                    |
| 2020/21               | 86,412  | 12.2%                                    |
| 2021/22               | 82,605  | 15.7%                                    |
| 2022/23               | 86,418  | 15.9%                                    |
| 2023/24               | 84,444  | 15.9%                                    |

### Stop and searches under PACE, England and Wales, 2009/10 to 2023/24



### **BIOLOGICAL TOXINS AND PETROL BOMBS**

294. This part of my statement sets out an overview of the current legislation governing castor beans (used to make ricin) and petrol bombs (and the ingredients that could be used to make them), in light of the fact that a search of AR's home, following the attack, found the plant-derived toxin ricin and presumed components of petrol bombs (also sometimes referred to as a Molotov cocktail). Police also found, among other things, manufacturing equipment, contaminated with ricin, and precursors for ricin, specifically a pestle and mortar, a glass conical flask, funnels, a pair of safety goggles, and a one-litre bottle of isopropyl alcohol, approximately three-quarters full, and an empty bag of castor beans.

The presence and combination of these items are consistent with the manufacture of ricin. Full details would be best sought from expert witnesses.

295. In Great Britain, the sale of certain chemical substances and poisons are regulated under the Poisons Act 1972. These categorise substances as either regulated or reportable. In determining which substances fall under these categories, the Home Office considers a range of factors including misuse potential, the impact on legitimate use, the necessity of regulation, and the principle of proportionality. Regulated substances require a licence for purchase by members of the public, and sellers must verify this licence and record transactions. Reportable substances do not require a licence but must be monitored for suspicious activity, with any concerns reported in accordance with section 3C of the Poisons Act 1972.
296. That legislation controls the sale of certain explosives precursors and poisons. The aim of the legislation is to control chemicals and poisons that can be used to cause harm, while still allowing members of the general public and businesses with a legitimate need to access these substances to continue their activities.
297. In October 2023, further measures were introduced to strengthen these controls and to bring new precursors and poisons into the regime.
298. The Home Office also oversees the Reporting Suspicious Chemical Activity Service, a public-facing tool hosted on GOV.UK. This service enables individuals and businesses to report suspicious transactions, thefts, or losses involving substances listed under the Poisons Act 1972. Reports are mandated under section 3C of the Poisons Act 1972,<sup>57</sup> when there is reasonable suspicion regarding the sale or attempted purchase of any substance listed in the Act or any significant disappearance or theft of such a substance.
299. To support sellers in fulfilling their legal duties, the Home Office has produced guidance materials. The Selling Chemicals Responsibly Campaign recommends that sellers: know the law, know their customer, and know what to do if they are suspicious.

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<sup>57</sup> Poisons Act 1972, sch 1A.

300. The Home Office continues to keep dangerous materials under review to ensure appropriate regulation and controls for sales are in place.

### **Ricin and castor beans**

#### *Current legislation*

301. The manufacture and retention of ricin is an offence under section 1 of the Biological Weapons Act 1974 (BWA 1974)<sup>58</sup> and section 2 of the Chemical Weapons Act 1996.<sup>59</sup> Ricin is one of a very small number of substances that are caught by both biological and chemical related legislation and international conventions, specifically the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention.

302. AR was charged with an offence under the BWA, which criminalises the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, and retention of biological agents or toxins.

303. Castor beans are not currently illegal to possess or grow in the UK,<sup>60</sup> but extracting ricin from castor beans would be an offence under section 1 of the BWA (developing or producing a toxin) or section 2 of the Chemical Weapons Act 1968 (developing or producing a chemical weapon). Isopropyl alcohol is not regulated under UK national security legislation.<sup>61</sup>

304. Castor beans are currently available from garden centres, online seed retailers and online marketplaces as the castor oil plant, *Ricinus communis*, is grown across the UK as an ornamental plant. The Home Office is in the early stages of working to consider the feasibility, and potential impacts and proportionality of further regulation for this issue as part of ongoing efforts to keep dangerous materials under review.

305. It is not legal to purchase ricin. We are not aware of individual suppliers' policies regarding castor beans and warning labels. Isopropyl alcohol usually comes with a caution label

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<sup>58</sup> BWA 1974, s1.

<sup>59</sup> Chemical Weapons Act 1996, s 2.

<sup>60</sup> Although possession of castor beans could be an offence if these were possessed in circumstances giving rise to a reasonable suspicion that it is for use in connection with terrorism (under section 57 of TACT 2000).

<sup>61</sup> Again, unless possessed in the circumstances described in s.57 TA 2000.

detailing the precautions needed. The Home Office continues to keep dangerous materials under review to ensure appropriate regulation and controls for sales are in place. As part of this, consideration will be given to the inclusion of risk communication measures, such as warning labels on castor bean packaging, as part of an ongoing evidence and information-gathering exercise with industry. This will help determine whether legislative amendments are necessary or if voluntary action by retailers and distributors could enhance public safety and awareness.

#### *Age restrictions*

306. There are no specific age restrictions on the sale of ricin, given it is an offence to develop, produce, stockpile, acquire or retain this substance. It is not therefore commercially available, being considered a potential weapon of mass destruction [**CE/77 - HOM000182 (UN Office for Disarmament Affairs: Weapons of Mass Destruction)**].
307. There are no age restrictions on the purchase of castor beans and there are no plans in place at this time to introduce age-related measures. Retailers may apply their own voluntary age restrictions on the sale of isopropyl alcohol.

#### *Enforcement of legislation*

308. The legislation relevant to ricin is enforced by law enforcement agencies using the usual powers of criminal investigation and prosecution.
309. Section 4 of the BWA<sup>62</sup> gives additional powers to a constable to obtain a warrant to search for and seize documents, equipment and substances, where there is reasonable ground for suspecting an offence under section 1 has been or is about to be committed.
310. Possession of bomb-making articles could, depending on the facts, be an offence under section 57 of the TACT 2000: possession of any article in circumstances giving rise to a reasonable suspicion that it is for use in connection with terrorism. Part 4 of the TACT 2000 confers additional powers on a constable (typically a counter terrorism police officer)

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<sup>62</sup> BWA 1974, s 4.

to investigate the commission, preparation, or instigation of acts of terrorism and of offences under that Act, including section 57.

### **Petrol Bombs**

311. No viable petrol bombs were identified at the scene. The search of AR's home identified 12x500ml brown glass beer bottles, an undefined number of these had hurricane survival matches attached to the outside with black duct tape. There was no accelerant (petrol) or traditional wick identified and therefore no viable petrol bomb.
312. If petrol and a wick had been present, then it could have amounted to a criminal offence to have these items in a home under the Explosives Substances Act 1883 (ESA 1883).<sup>63</sup>
313. The components of a petrol bomb are simple and have wide-reaching everyday uses and as such are not restricted or regulated (beyond the requirement to be over 16 years old to purchase petrol).
314. Possession of bomb-making articles could, depending on the facts, be an offence under section 57 of the TACT 2000:<sup>64</sup> possession of any article in circumstances giving rise to a reasonable suspicion that it is for use in connection with terrorism (see footnote 63 below and [CE/78 – HOM000116 (R v Bouch [1982] 3 WLR 673)]).
315. The legislation relevant to explosive substances is enforced by law enforcement agencies using the usual powers of criminal investigation and prosecution.
316. Section 8 of the ESA 1883 gives additional powers to a constable to search for, seize, forfeit and dispose of explosive substances,<sup>65</sup> and as per the above Part 4 of the TACT 2000 confers additional powers on a constable (typically a counter terrorism police officer)

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<sup>63</sup> For example, section 3(1)(b) criminalises unlawfully and maliciously making, or having in your possession or control, an explosive substance with intent to endanger life or property. Under section 9, "explosive substance" is deemed to include any materials for making any explosive substance; also any apparatus, machine, implement, or materials used, or intended to be used, or adapted for causing, or aiding in causing, any explosion in or with any explosive substance; also any part of any such apparatus, machine, or implement.

In *R v Bouch* [1982], the Court of Appeal confirmed that a breakable container (typically a milk bottle) filled with petrol and fitted with a wick constitutes an explosive substance under section 3(1)(b) of the ESA 1883.

<sup>64</sup> TACT 2000, s 57.

<sup>65</sup> ESA 1883, s 8.

to investigate the commission, preparation, or instigation of acts of terrorism and of offences under that Act, including section 57.

317. The ESA 1883 is kept under review to ensure it remains fit for purpose in addressing evolving threats and maintaining public safety.

## **TACKLING ONLINE HARMS**

### **Roles and responsibilities**

318. The Home Office shares responsibilities for developing policy and operational responses to Online Harms with the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and law enforcement partners. The Home Office's responsibilities include policy development for illegal online activity (including – terrorism, serious violence, child sexual exploitation and abuse and fraud) and the enablement of law enforcement investigation and prosecution through offences and powers – including whether more powers and offences are required to address the impact of online harms and violence fixated individuals. The Home Office also supports the counter-Terrorism Internet Referral Unit which identifies and seeks to remove illegal online content.

319. The Home Office has a responsibility to create the legislative and policy environment to prevent harm occurring in the first instance and to enable law enforcement to investigate and prosecute crimes.

320. DSIT is the lead government department for technology policy, regulation and legislation. It oversees the regulatory framework for online safety, has ownership of the OSA 2023, and manages the relationship with the independent online regulator Office of Communications (Ofcom) responsible for implementation of the OSA. DSIT has a role in co-ordinating policies concerning online harms across government.

321. CTP is responsible for investigating terrorist activity, including where this has an online element. As part of its response to terrorism that has an online component, CTP established the Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit (CTIRU) in 2010. The CTIRU plays a central role in this process by reporting potentially unlawful content to technology companies for removal under their own terms of service. CTIRU receives referrals from

law enforcement, government, and the public via the iReportIt App and the Government's reporting website. To support the swift removal of terrorist material, the Home Office and its contractors also refer content discovered through open-source research using to CTIRU. However, the absence of a bulk referral mechanism limits the volume of content that can be addressed quickly. In response, the Home Office engages directly with technology companies to expedite the removal of specific content and continues to work with CTIRU to improve these processes. However, neither CTIRU, nor government, have powers to mandate the removal of illegal content.

### **Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA)**

322. The OSA, developed jointly by DSIT and the Home Office, aims to reduce online harms in the UK. Following the enactment of the OSA the Office of Communications (Ofcom), the online safety regulator, published statutory Codes of Practice for the Protection of Children online and statutory Guidance on Content Harmful to Children. The Home Office has a dedicated unit which provides a strategic steer to Ofcom supporting their efforts to put these measures in place. Insofar as is potentially relevant, under the OSA:

- (a) Since 17 March 2025, online platforms must have systems and process in place to identify and remove illegal content and to protect their users from the illegal content, including terrorism content.
- (b) Since 25 July 2025 under the Protection of Children Codes, platforms must prevent children from accessing various categories of harmful content, which includes serious violence content (and OFCOM's Guidance on Content Harmful to Children provides information to platforms about content considered harmful in each category). Platforms are required to use "highly effective" age assurance technology (which is required to meet specified criteria).

323. The Home Office works and will continue to work closely with DSIT to ensure the OSA has impact in preventing children from accessing violent and extremist material online.

324. DSIT are the lead Department for evaluating the impact of the OSA. The Home Office, alongside DSIT are closely monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of the OSA and are committed to strengthening our laws, if it does not deliver the necessary protections to ensure a safer online environment.

## **Home Office work to identify and address illegal and harmful content**

325. Generally, the Home Office focuses on thematic interventions to address threats rather than responding to individual pieces of content.
326. The Home Office is actively enhancing its approach to countering terrorist content online through a comprehensive industry development programme. This initiative aims to increase awareness and capability across a wide range of technology platforms, including encrypted messaging apps, small technology firms, social media and the 'big tech' firms, by offering targeted engagement, threat briefings, and tailored guidance on UK legislative requirements (e.g. Terrorism Acts 2000 and 2006, and the OSA). The programme supports companies in developing robust content moderation policies and crisis response mechanisms. The Home Office will keep the approach and content of this programme under review.
327. The Home Office is working closely with international partners to better understand and tackle online radicalisation. The UK is a committed member of the Christchurch Call,<sup>66</sup> and is currently chairing the Five Country Ministerial Countering Violent Extremism Working Group, which brings together policymakers from the Five Eyes alliance to share expertise and explore joint initiatives, recognising the importance of strengthening the understanding of online and offline radicalisation to violence.
328. The Home Office also engages with the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT), a multistakeholder initiative founded by Meta, YouTube, Microsoft and X, to coordinate international efforts to disrupt terrorist and violent extremist exploitation of digital platforms. Through tools like the hash-sharing database and the Incident Response Framework, GIFCT enables rapid cross-platform responses to online threats, while also

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<sup>66</sup> The Christchurch Call to Action political summit took place in May 2019 after the terrorist attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. The summit resulted in a number of countries pledging to eliminate terrorist and violent extremist content online. The Christchurch Call community now comprises of 55 national governments and the European Commission, 19 online service providers, 13 partner organisations, and more than 50 civil society experts and organisations.

supporting long-term collaboration across governments, tech companies, and civil society.

329. In parallel, the Home Office is working with the Violence Prevention Network<sup>67</sup> to develop a voluntary Code of Conduct for technology platforms, building on commitments made in the Christchurch Call. This code encourages proactive measures such as using on-platform signals to detect radicalisation and directing users to educational and support resources. Ofcom has been briefed and is supportive of this initiative, recognising its potential to inform future codes of practice. This initiative is intended to complement the OSA. With a robust evidence base, Ofcom has indicated that there may be future opportunities to incorporate these proactive approaches into its formal codes of practice.
330. In the 2025 Lessons for Prevent Report, Lord Anderson recommended (recommendation 4) that the Home Office explore how evidence of online activity could be used to identify potential subjects for Prevent. This recommendation is being considered by Prevent policy teams, who will build on recent work to develop new capabilities in this area.
331. Complementing this operational effort is the strategic analytical work of the Research, Information and Communication Unit (RICU), which provides analysis and insight on terrorist use of propaganda and exploitation of the internet to inform the UK's counter-terrorism system. RICU conducts an annual Platform Prioritisation Exercise to identify platforms most exploited by terrorist actors. Using a combination of open-source intelligence, subject matter expertise, and AI, RICU produces a Platform Index that guides engagement priorities. This methodology is now updated biannually to ensure agility in responding to emerging threats. RICU's broader analysis also informs Prevent delivery by enhancing understanding of online radicalisation.
332. Outside of radicalisation specifically, the Home Office engages with technology companies and international partners bilaterally and through international forums like the G7 and Five Eyes network, to share insight, approaches to policy development and to collaborate where possible to counter a range of online threats.

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<sup>67</sup> A civil society organisation based in Germany engaged in preventing and countering violent extremism.

333. In recognition of the growing threat from the influence of the online information environment on vulnerable and violent individuals, the Home Office had already dedicated additional resource to tackling tech enabled harm before the attack, and has continued to invest in this work since.
334. The Home Office constantly reviews a range of existing and emerging harms that are not illegal but cause harm to individuals or society. The Home Office continues to develop policy responses to reduce the impact of harms below the threshold and regularly considers a range of responses including, where proportionate, whether new or emerging threats should be criminalised through legislation, and providing advice to Ministers on the most appropriate course of action.
335. Although as already noted above, the Home Office works to identify and address illegal and terrorist content is thematic rather than responsive to individual content, in some cases, operational partners may share specific case details which could include specific pieces of content viewed, or which are of concerns to partners through their normal operational duties, to inform Home Office policy or operational responses. For example, CTP did share some (very limited) content viewed by AR with a very limited and controlled distribution in the Home Office after the investigation had concluded, to help inform the strategic Home Office response.

#### **Powers to remove content**

336. It is important to be clear that currently, UK law does not provide for Government or law enforcement to compel platforms to remove specific pieces of illegal content, save in respect of terrorist content. While the OSA requires platforms to have proportionate systems and processes to detect and remove illegal content, removal of specific pieces of content when informed by law enforcement is voluntary, unless platforms agree it breaches law or their terms of service.
337. Section 3 of the Terrorism Act 2006<sup>68</sup> empowers police to issue removal notices for online content assessed to be unlawfully terrorism related. However, at the time of preparing this statement, this authority has not yet been exercised.

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<sup>68</sup> TACT 2006, s 3.

### Action in connection with content viewed by AR

338. After the sentencing of AR, on 24 January 2025 the Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, issued a joint letter to major social media companies and industry leaders repeating a request made in November 2024 for the removal of specific content accessed by AR as well as other material that had formed the basis of prosecutions under section 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006<sup>69</sup> and section 58 of the TACT 2000<sup>70</sup> [CE/79 - HOM000092 (HO and DSIT Letter 24 January 2025)]. This included a request to remove the document “Military Studies in the Jihad against the Tyrants: The Al-Qaeda Training Manual”, where available on their platforms. The letter also references graphic bystander footage of the Sydney stabbing of Bishop Mari Emmanuel on 15 April 2024, which it appears AR searched for on the morning of the Southport attack. The letter stated that while the video had been removed in Australia following a Class 1 removal notice, it remained accessible in the UK. The letter asked for urgent removal of this from platforms to ensure it was not used to inspire other attacks.

### Access to social media accounts following an attack

339. I understand that the police investigation into AR did not obtain details of AR’s Instagram or X accounts, both based in the USA, and further that the Inquiry is looking to obtain this information. In the paragraphs that follow, I set out in some detail the powers that are available to law enforcement to seek data held in overseas jurisdictions (in particular the USA) and the circumstances in which that data should be made available.

340. Many of the popular telecommunications services, such as social media platforms and messaging services, operate within US jurisdiction and are subject to US law. US law prohibits these companies from being able to share certain data in response to a request made directly by a foreign government.

341. Mutual legal assistance [CE/80 – HOM000105 (Mutual legal assistance guidance - GOV.UK)] (MLA) is a method of cooperation between states for obtaining assistance in the investigation or prosecution of criminal offences. Requests are made by a formal

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<sup>69</sup> TACT 2006, s 2.

<sup>70</sup> TACT 2000, s 58.

International Letter of Request (ILOR). MLA requests from the UK for evidence must be issued by a court or a designated prosecuting authority. A court may issue requests on behalf of the defence, once proceedings have been instituted. Where direct transmission of ILORs by prosecuting authorities is not possible, as is the case for requests made to the USA, ILORs will be transmitted by the appropriate Central Authority in the UK to the Requested State. The UK Central Authority (UKCA), within the Home Office, coordinates MLA requests in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, except for tax and fiscal customs criminal matters which are coordinated by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC). Whilst Part 34 of the Civil Procedure Rules contains a procedure for use in civil proceedings, whereby the High Court may order the issue of a letter of request to the judicial authorities of a country where a proposed deponent resides, this only applies to witness evidence and not data production.

342. Alongside MLAs, UK law enforcement can use the UK-USA Agreement on Access to Electronic Data for the Purpose of Countering Serious Crime (DAA),<sup>71</sup> which came into force in October 2022, to access data held in the US.

343. The DAA is a reciprocal agreement which allows UK and US law enforcement to directly request data held by communication service providers in the other party's jurisdiction for the exclusive purpose of preventing, detecting, investigating and prosecuting serious crimes such as terrorism, child sexual abuse and exploitation.

344. The purpose of the DAA is to resolve conflicts in law that would otherwise prevent communication service providers in the US and UK from responding to legal process issued by the other party for content data for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of a serious crime (serious crime means an offence that is punishable by a maximum term of imprisonment of at least three years).

345. The UK's use of the DAA is underpinned by the Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) 2016 and the Crime (Overseas Production Orders) Act 2019 (COPOA 2019).<sup>72</sup> The COPOA 2019 provides UK law enforcement agencies and prosecutors with the power to apply for and obtain electronic data directly from service providers based outside the UK for the

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<sup>71</sup> UK-USA Agreement on Access to Electronic Data for the Purpose of Countering Serious Crime (DAA).

<sup>72</sup> COPOA 2019.

purposes of criminal investigations and prosecutions for serious crime, where a relevant international agreement is in place. The DAA is the first such relevant international agreement designated for the purposes of the COPOA 2019.

346. An application for an Overseas Production Order (OPO) may only be made by an appropriate officer as defined in section 2 of the COPOA 2019. Each OPO must be approved by a Crown Court Judge in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or a judge of the High Court of Justiciary or the Sheriff in Scotland. An OPO can only be issued if the judge is satisfied there are reasonable grounds for believing that an indictable offence has been committed and proceedings in respect of the offence have been instituted or the offence is being investigated, or the order is sought for the purposes of a terrorist investigation.

347. The judge must also be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that some or all of the data that is being applied for will be of substantial value to the investigation or proceedings. The judge must be satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that all or part of the electronic data specified or described in an application for an overseas production order is likely to be relevant evidence in respect of the offence to which the application relates. "Relevant evidence" means anything that would be admissible in proceedings in respect of that offence.<sup>73</sup>

348. If an OPO is issued to a Covered Provider, as defined under the DAA (such as a social media platform), the Covered Provider will provide the information sought unless there are objections to doing so (which will be on the basis that the Covered Provider reasonably believes the DAA may not properly be invoked in respect of the specific material identified in the OPO). Objections would be raised in the first instance with the UK Designated Authority (UKDA) (which operates the DAA for the UK on behalf of the SSHD) as the Issuing Party. If the dispute cannot be resolved between the Covered Provider and the UKDA, then the Covered Provider may raise objections with the US Designated Authority (which operates the DAA on behalf of the US Attorney General) as the Receiving Party. Both Designated Authorities may also discuss the Covered Providers objections. The Designated Authority of the Receiving Party will in that situation, make the final determination as to whether the DAA is invoked for a specific Order.

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<sup>73</sup> COPOA 2019, s 4(11).

349. Any decision to utilise the DAA and COPO to obtain electronic data for a specific investigation is an operational decision for law enforcement and will be dependent on a number of factors, including if the nature of the investigation meets the threshold of COPO and the DAA.
350. OPOs cannot be used to obtain data for use outside of proceedings in respect of the offence to which the application relates.
351. The Government will continue to review the operation of the DAA and COPOA 2019 to ensure it remains fit for purpose and identify any areas where further policy or legislative change may be required.
352. Independently, through the Crime and Policing Bill 2024–25 cl. 130-137<sup>74</sup> the Government is also introducing powers for police and other law enforcement agencies (LEAs) to secure vital evidence in criminal investigations and for national security purposes, including examinations at UK borders, directly from online accounts.
353. These reforms will enable police and other LEAs listed in the legislation to access, search and extract information from online accounts, including from accounts with social media companies, which have previously been accessed from a seized electronic device, such as a mobile phone or a computer. These powers will be subject to safeguards, in particular exercise of these powers will require the authorisation of a senior officer, and to a Code of Practice. In the case of the powers in clause 130, their use must be relevant to a reasonable line of enquiry, it must not be reasonably practicable to obtain the relevant information by other means, and the use must be only for specified purposes, namely preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting crime, or protecting the public from terrorism and state threats. Access to online information as part of an examination at a port (under clause 135) will only be for the purpose of determining whether the person appears to be involved in terrorism or hostile state activity.

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<sup>74</sup> CPB 2024–25, cl 130-137.

354. If enacted, the Home Office will continue to review the operation of these powers once they are in force and consider whether additional measures are necessary.

355. I wish to end this statement by reiterating that my thoughts and condolences remain with the families of the victims and all those affected by the attack.

**STATEMENT OF TRUTH**

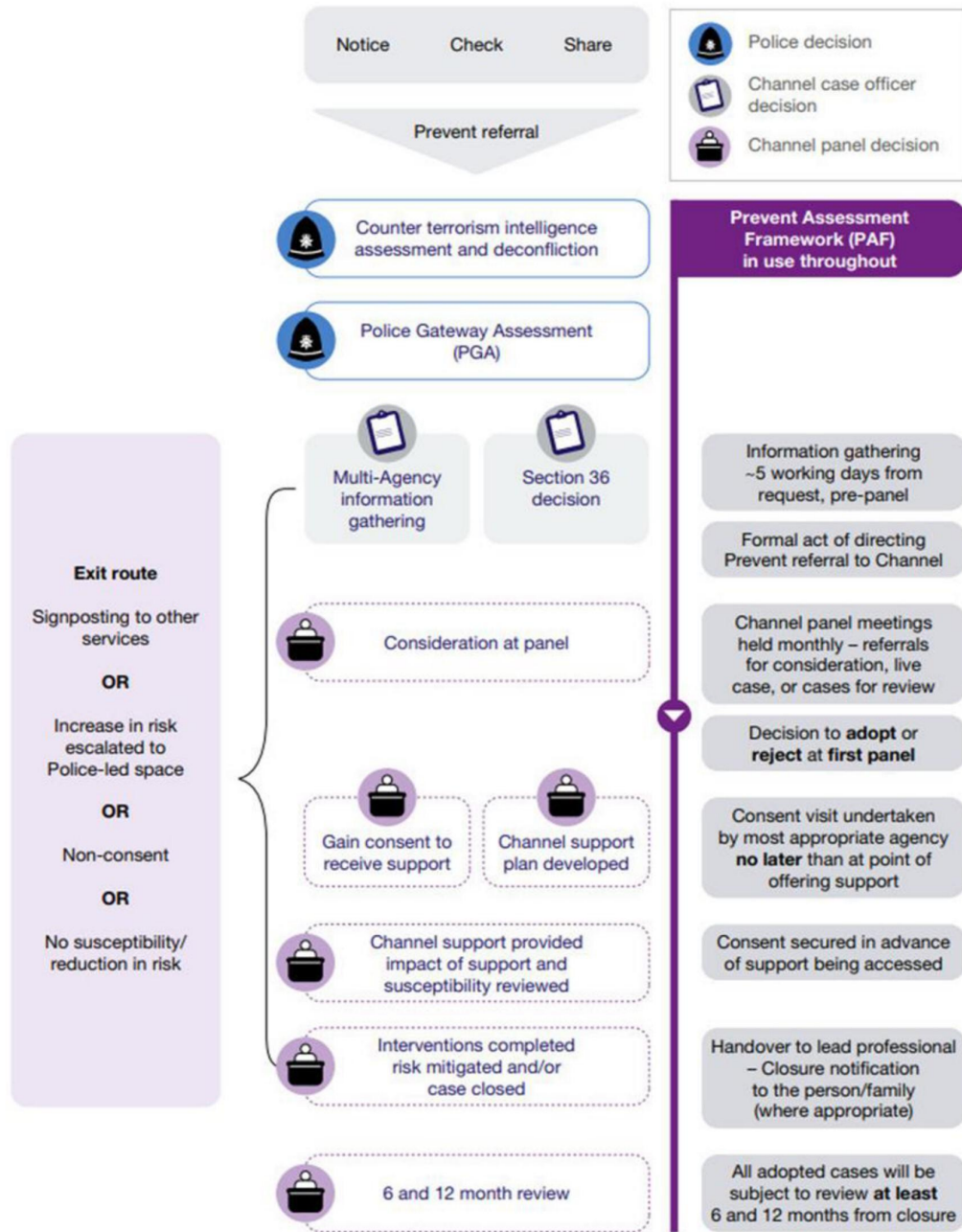
I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief in its truth.

Signed

**Signature**

Dated 25 September 2025

**Annex A: Prevent referral pathway diagram** (p27 of The Channel Duty Guidance)



## **Annex B: Knife Crime Statistical Trends**

### **(1) & (2) Injuries caused by assaults involving knives and Offences relating to knives**

Offences involving a knife or sharp instrument (knife-enabled crime) includes offences where a knife or sharp instrument has been used to injure a victim or used as a threat. This will include offences where the weapon may not have been seen but is believed to be present at the time of the offence by the victim or another witness. It is important to note that not every knife-enabled offence led to a knife being used or an injury.

Knife-enabled crime recorded by the police decreased by 1% in the year ending (YE) March 2025 (to 53,047 offences), compared with YE March 2024 (53,685 offences). This was 4% lower than YE March 2020 (55,170 offences).

Most knife-enabled crimes were assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm (43%) and robbery (42%) offences. Fewer than 1% of knife-enabled crimes were homicide offences (0.4%). Knife-enabled homicide fell by 23% (to 204 offences) compared with the previous year (265 offences).

Tables showing the trends in these data are included below:

- Please note that trends in knife-enabled offences were affected by covid-19 lockdowns during 2020/21.
- Over the time period of this data collection, most police forces have made data quality and recording improvements which means data from earlier years are not directly comparable with recent years. Therefore, the data prior to 2019/20 are not directly comparable.
- The first table shows only the comparable data from 2019/20 onwards; the second table shows the longer time series, in order to meet the request for data over at least 10 years.
- Greater Manchester police reviewed their recording of knife or sharp instrument offences in December 2017. This revealed that they were under-counting these offences. Following this review, there has been a sharp increase in the number of knife or sharp instrument offences recorded by GMP in January to December 2018 compared with previous quarters. The data is therefore not comparable. Due to this, data from GMP has been excluded from the long time-series table (Table 2) below (but a table with just GMP data as part of the total has been included for reference – Table 3).

**Table 1. Number of selected violent and sexual offences involving a knife or sharp instrument recorded by the police in England and Wales (all forces)**

| Selected offences   | Apr 2019 to<br>Mar 2020 | Apr 2020 to<br>Mar 2021 | Apr 2021 to<br>Mar 2022 | Apr 2022 to<br>Mar 2023 | Apr 2023 to<br>Mar 2024 | Apr 2024 to<br>Mar 2025 |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Attempted murder  | 494                     | 482                     | 444                     | 443                     | 432                     | 452                     |
| Threats to kill   | 4,935                   | 5,046                   | 5,929                   | 6,127                   | 5,690                   | 6,060                   |
| Assault with injury and assault with intent to cause serious harm | 24,088                  | 21,971                  | 24,313                  | 23,671                  | 23,709                  | 22,749                  |
| Robbery   | 24,419                  | 16,188                  | 17,098                  | 20,193                  | 22,454                  | 22,226                  |
| Rape  | 684                     | 585                     | 725                     | 749                     | 796                     | 982                     |
| Sexual assault  | 285                     | 220                     | 401                     | 315                     | 339                     | 374                     |
| <b>Total selected offences</b>                                    | <b>54,905</b>           | <b>44,492</b>           | <b>48,910</b>           | <b>51,498</b>           | <b>53,420</b>           | <b>52,843</b>           |
| Homicide  | 265                     | 235                     | 280                     | 244                     | 265                     | 204                     |
| <b>Total selected offences including homicide</b>                 | <b>55,170</b>           | <b>44,727</b>           | <b>49,190</b>           | <b>51,742</b>           | <b>53,685</b>           | <b>53,047</b>           |

**Table 2. Number of selected violent and sexual offences involving a knife or sharp instrument recorded by the police, England and Wales (excluding Greater Manchester police)**

| <b>Selected offences</b>   | <b>Apr<br/>2010<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2011</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2011<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2012</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2012<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2013</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2013<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2014</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2014<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2015</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2015<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2016</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2016<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2017</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2017<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2018</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2018<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2019</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2019<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2020</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2020<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2021</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2021<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2022</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2022<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2023</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2023<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2024</b> | <b>Apr<br/>2024<br/>to<br/>Mar<br/>2025</b> |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attempted murder   | 217   | 234   | 180   | 226   | 260   | 336   | 338   | 369   | 409   | 460   | 459   | 416   | 414   | 408   | 435   |
| Threats to kill  | 1,424                                       | 1,172                                       | 1,155                                       | 1,295                                       | 1,696                                       | 2,297                                       | 2,918                                       | 3,385                                       | 3,954                                       | 4,746                                       | 4,790                                       | 5,551                                       | 5,779                                       | 5,341                                       | 5,694                                       |
| Assault with injury<br>and assault with<br>intent to cause<br>serious harm | 14,647                                      | 13,130                                      | 11,839                                      | 12,203                                      | 13,836                                      | 16,187                                      | 19,455                                      | 21,765                                      | 22,821                                      | 22,873                                      | 20,589                                      | 22,610                                      | 22,169                                      | 22,125                                      | 21,184                                      |
| Robbery  | 17,187                                      | 16,978                                      | 13,692                                      | 12,451                                      | 11,025                                      | 11,496                                      | 14,329                                      | 19,138                                      | 21,226                                      | 22,727                                      | 14,842                                      | 15,657                                      | 18,807                                      | 21,171                                      | 20,865                                      |
| Rape   | 240   | 219   | 174   | 234   | 285   | 309   | 401   | 436   | 525   | 646   | 559   | 694   | 709   | 741   | 925   |
| Sexual assault   | 85  | 71  | 81  | 92  | 121   | 106   | 169   | 157   | 157   | 277   | 210   | 385   | 297   | 315   | 353   |
| <b>Total selected<br/>offences</b>   | <b>33,800</b>                               | <b>31,804</b>                               | <b>27,121</b>                               | <b>26,501</b>                               | <b>27,223</b>                               | <b>30,731</b>                               | <b>37,610</b>                               | <b>45,250</b>                               | <b>49,092</b>                               | <b>51,729</b>                               | <b>41,449</b>                               | <b>45,313</b>                               | <b>48,175</b>                               | <b>50,101</b>                               | <b>49,456</b>                               |
| Homicide   | 220   | 200   | 182   | 193   | 178   | 196   | 201   | 265   | 250   | 253   | 222   | 259   | 229   | 253   | 193   |
| <b>Total selected<br/>offences including<br/>homicide</b>                  | <b>34,020</b>                               | <b>32,004</b>                               | <b>27,303</b>                               | <b>26,694</b>                               | <b>27,401</b>                               | <b>30,927</b>                               | <b>37,811</b>                               | <b>45,515</b>                               | <b>49,342</b>                               | <b>51,982</b>                               | <b>41,671</b>                               | <b>45,572</b>                               | <b>48,404</b>                               | <b>50,354</b>                               | <b>49,649</b>                               |
| Total selected<br>offences including<br>homicide (inc GMP)                 | 36,068                                      | 33,740                                      | 28,902                                      | 28,337                                      | 29,162                                      | 32,724                                      | 39,468                                      | 47,467                                      | 52,511                                      | 55,170                                      | 44,727                                      | 49,190                                      | 51,742                                      | 53,685                                      | 53,047                                      |

**Table 3. Number of selected violent and sexual offences involving a knife or sharp instrument, Greater Manchester Police only**

| Selected offences  | Apr<br>2010<br>to<br>Mar<br>2011 | Apr<br>2011<br>to<br>Mar<br>2012 | Apr<br>2012<br>to<br>Mar<br>2013 | Apr<br>2013<br>to<br>Mar<br>2014 | Apr<br>2014<br>to<br>Mar<br>2015 | Apr<br>2015<br>to<br>Mar<br>2016 | Apr<br>2016<br>to<br>Mar<br>2017 | Apr<br>2017<br>to<br>Mar<br>2018 | Apr<br>2018<br>to<br>Mar<br>2019 | Apr<br>2019<br>to<br>Mar<br>2020 | Apr<br>2020<br>to<br>Mar<br>2021 | Apr<br>2021<br>to<br>Mar<br>2022 | Apr<br>2022<br>to<br>Mar<br>2023 | Apr<br>2023<br>to<br>Mar<br>2024 | Apr<br>2024<br>to<br>Mar<br>2025 |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Attempted murder   | 23                               | 12                               | 18                               | 22                               | 15                               | 17                               | 26                               | 33                               | 30                               | 34                               | 23                               | 28                               | 29                               | 24                               | 17                               |
| Threats to kill  | 110                              | 80                               | 84                               | 84                               | 154                              | 135                              | 111                              | 117                              | 240                              | 189                              | 256                              | 378                              | 348                              | 349                              | 366                              |
| Assault with injury and assault<br>with intent to cause serious harm | 812                              | 729                              | 643                              | 636                              | 806                              | 897                              | 734                              | 789                              | 1,168                            | 1,215                            | 1,382                            | 1,703                            | 1,502                            | 1,584                            | 1,565                            |
| Robbery  | 1,061                            | 888                              | 818                              | 859                              | 735                              | 696                              | 730                              | 947                              | 1,641                            | 1,692                            | 1,346                            | 1,441                            | 1,386                            | 1,283                            | 1,361                            |
| Rape   | 18                               | 18                               | 16                               | 27                               | 36                               | 24                               | 29                               | 38                               | 69                               | 38                               | 26                               | 31                               | 40                               | 55                               | 57                               |
| Sexual assault   | 8                                | 1                                | 7                                | 5                                | 7                                | 14                               | 13                               | 11                               | 12                               | 8                                | 10                               | 16                               | 18                               | 24                               | 21                               |
| <b>Total selected offences</b>                                       | <b>2,032</b>                     | <b>1,728</b>                     | <b>1,586</b>                     | <b>1,633</b>                     | <b>1,753</b>                     | <b>1,783</b>                     | <b>1,643</b>                     | <b>1,935</b>                     | <b>3,160</b>                     | <b>3,176</b>                     | <b>3,043</b>                     | <b>3,597</b>                     | <b>3,323</b>                     | <b>3,319</b>                     | <b>3,387</b>                     |
| Homicide   | 16                               | 8                                | 13                               | 10                               | 8                                | 14                               | 14                               | 17                               | 9                                | 12                               | 13                               | 21                               | 15                               | 12                               | 11                               |
| <b>Total selected offences<br/>including homicide</b>                | <b>2,048</b>                     | <b>1,736</b>                     | <b>1,599</b>                     | <b>1,643</b>                     | <b>1,761</b>                     | <b>1,797</b>                     | <b>1,657</b>                     | <b>1,952</b>                     | <b>3,169</b>                     | <b>3,188</b>                     | <b>3,056</b>                     | <b>3,618</b>                     | <b>3,338</b>                     | <b>3,331</b>                     | <b>3,398</b>                     |

In addition to police recorded crime data above, data collected by NHS on admission to hospital for injuries caused by an assault with a sharp object are included below.

The latest provisional admissions data for NHS hospitals in England and Wales showed a 10% decrease in the number of admissions for assault by a sharp object in YE March 2025 (to 3,508 admissions). This was 26% below YE March 2020 (4,769 admissions).

**Table 4: Number of hospital admissions in NHS hospitals in England and Wales for assault with sharp objects by age group, year ending March 2013 to year ending March 2025**

| Admissions                   | Age group   | Apr 2012 to Mar 2013 | Apr 2013 to Mar 2014 | Apr 2014 to Mar 2015 | Apr 2015 to Mar 2016 | Apr 2016 to Mar 2017 | Apr 2017 to Mar 2018 | Apr 2018 to Mar 2019 | Apr 2019 to Mar 2020 | Apr 2020 to Mar 2021 | Apr 2021 to Mar 2022 | Apr 2022 to Mar 2023 | Apr 2023 to Mar 2024 | Apr 2024 to Mar 2025 |
|------------------------------|-------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| England and Wales Admissions | 0 to 24     | 1,562                | 1,486                | 1,426                | 1,594                | 1,829                | 2,116                | 2,052                | 1,831                | 1,647                | 1,595                | 1,438                | 1,441                | 1,217                |
| England and Wales Admissions | 25 and over | 2,388                | 2,298                | 2,244                | 2,540                | 2,609                | 2,921                | 3,108                | 2,915                | 2,448                | 2,560                | 2,326                | 2,419                | 2,244                |
| England and Wales Admissions | Total       | 3,960                | 3,794                | 3,684                | 4,151                | 4,466                | 5,103                | 5,192                | 4,769                | 4,112                | 4,185                | 3,789                | 3,900                | 3,508                |

Separate data is recorded by police on possession of an article with a blade or point.

Police recorded "possession of article with a blade or point" offences increased by 2% in YE March 2025 (28,314 offences), compared with YE March 2024 (27,646 offences).

Trends in possession offences are likely to be influenced by police activity and operations, particularly stop and search.

Table 5. Police recorded crime for Possession of an article with blade or point, and total possession of weapons offences.

| Offence category                            | Apr 2008 to Mar 2009 | Apr 2009 to Mar 2010 | Apr 2010 to Mar 2011 | Apr 2011 to Mar 2012 | Apr 2012 to Mar 2013 | Apr 2013 to Mar 2014 | Apr 2014 to Mar 2015 | Apr 2015 to Mar 2016 | Apr 2016 to Mar 2017 | Apr 2017 to Mar 2018 | Apr 2018 to Mar 2019 | Apr 2019 to Mar 2020 | Apr 2020 to Mar 2021 | Apr 2021 to Mar 2022 | Apr 2022 to Mar 2023 | Apr 2023 to Mar 2024 | Apr 2024 to Mar 2025 |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Possession of article with blade or point   | 13,985               | 10,885               | 10,474               | 9,762                | 8,425                | 9,050                | 9,889                | 11,631               | 14,453               | 18,468               | 22,302               | 23,265               | 20,747               | 24,812               | 28,496               | 27,646               | 28,314               |
| <b>Total possession of weapons offences</b> | <b>35,662</b>        | <b>28,758</b>        | <b>26,327</b>        | <b>23,688</b>        | <b>19,910</b>        | <b>20,623</b>        | <b>21,890</b>        | <b>25,834</b>        | <b>31,318</b>        | <b>39,056</b>        | <b>46,493</b>        | <b>47,685</b>        | <b>44,698</b>        | <b>49,104</b>        | <b>57,596</b>        | <b>58,166</b>        | <b>57,410</b>        |

**(3) The use by police of ‘stop and search’ powers to look for weapons**

- Between 2009/10 and 2023/24, the number of stop and searches for offensive weapons **fell by 30%**, from **120,764** to **84,444**.
- From 2009/10 to 2016/17, searches for offensive weapons **dropped by 73%**, reaching **32,860**, just over a quarter of the initial figure. This period reflects the most significant sustained decline.
- Between 2016/17 and 2019/20, searches for offensive weapons **increased by 178%**, climbing to **91,491**. This brought volumes back to levels comparable with **2011/12**, indicating a marked shift in activity.
- From 2019/20 to 2023/24, search volumes for offensive weapons stabilised, with a modest **8% decrease** over four years. The total searches for offensive weapons in **2023/24** stood at **84,444** searches.
- In 2023/24, searches for offensive weapons made up 15.9% of all searches, a similar proportion to the year earlier but an increase from 10.3% in 2009/10 (and from 6.7% at the low-point in 2013/14).

**Table 6: Number of stop and searches for offensive weapons, and proportion of all searches, England and Wales, 2009/10 to 2023/24**

| <b>Financial year</b> | <b>Number of stop and searches for<br/>offensive weapons, England and<br/>Wales</b> | <b>Proportion of all searches under<br/>PACE</b> |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| 2009/10               | 120,764   | 10.3%  |
| 2010/11               | 122,523   | 10.0%  |
| 2011/12               | 101,212   | 8.9%   |
| 2012/13               | 74,369  | 7.3%   |
| 2013/14               | 60,630  | 6.7%   |
| 2014/15               | 38,175  | 7.1%   |
| 2015/16               | 35,573  | 9.3%   |
| 2016/17               | 32,860  | 10.8%  |
| 2017/18               | 39,050  | 14.0%  |
| 2018/19               | 60,286  | 16.2%  |
| 2019/20               | 91,491  | 16.1%  |
| 2020/21               | 86,412  | 12.2%  |
| 2021/22               | 82,605  | 15.7%  |
| 2022/23               | 86,418  | 15.9%  |
| 2023/24               | 84,444  | 15.9%  |

### **Annex C: Acronyms and Defined Terms**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1959 Act            | Restrictions of Offensive Weapons Act 1959  |
| AI                  | Artificial Intelligence   |
| AR                  | The perpetrator   |
| BWA                 | Biological Weapons Act 1974   |
| CC                  | Channel Coordinator   |
| CJA 1988            | Criminal Justice Act 1988   |
| CMIS                | Channel Management Information System   |
| CONTEST             | UK Government's Counter-Terrorism Strategy  |
| COPO / COPOA 2019   | Crime (Overseas Production Orders) Act 2019   |
| CPB 2024-25         | Crime and Policing Bill 2024–25 (CPB 2024–25)   |
| CSAAP               | Correctional Services Advice and Accreditation Panel  |
| CSO                 | Civil Society Organisations   |
| CT-ARC              | Counter-Terrorism-Assessment and Rehabilitation Centre  |
| CTCO                | Counter-Terrorism Case Officer  |
| CTIRU               | Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit  |
| CTIM                | Counter Terrorism Investigation of Minors Outcomes Toolkit  |
| CT Minors SOG / SOG | CT Minors Senior Oversight Group  |
| CTP                 | Counter-Terrorism Policing  |
| CTPHQ               | CTP Headquarters  |
| CTSA 2015           | Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015   |
| DAA                 | UK-USA Agreement on Access to Electronic Data for the Purpose of Countering Serious Crime / Data Access Agreement |
| DfE                 | Department for Education  |
| DHSC                | Department of Health and Social Care  |
| DIF                 | Dynamic Investigation Framework   |
| DSIT                | Department for Science Innovation and Technology  |
| EGVE                | Ending Gang Violence and Exploitation   |
| EGYV                | Ending Gang and Youth Violence  |
| ESA 1883            | Explosives Substances Act 1883  |
| FIMU                | Fixed Intelligence Management Unit  |
| Five Eyes           | Intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States         |

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| G7                          | Intergovernmental political and economic forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.       |
| GIFCT                       | Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism  |
| GMP                         | Greater Manchester police   |
| HMCTS                       | His Majesty's Courts & Tribunals Service  |
| HMPPS                       | His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service  |
| HMRC                        | His Majesty's Revenue & Customs   |
| HSG                         | Homeland Security Group of the Home Office  |
| IP                          | Intervention Provider   |
| IP Address                  | Internet Protocol address – a numeral label assigned to a device connected to a computer network that uses the Internet Protocol for communication. |
| IPA / IPA 2016              | Investigatory Powers Act 2016   |
| IRP Report / IRP / IRP 2023 | Independent Review of Prevent report  |
| IRTL                        | Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation   |
| JAT                         | Joint Assessment Team   |
| KCPOs                       | Knife Crime Prevention Orders   |
| KER                         | Knife-Enabled Robbery   |
| LEAs                        | Law Enforcement Agencies  |
| LOR / ILOR                  | Letter of Request / International Letter of Request   |
| MLA                         | Mutual Legal Assistance   |
| MUU                         | Mixed, Unstable or Unclear  |
| NAS                         | National Autistic Society   |
| NBCC                        | National Business Crime Centre  |
| NPCC                        | National Police Chiefs' Council   |
| NSC                         | National Security Council   |
| Ofcom                       | The Office of Communications  |
| OPO                         | Overseas Production Order   |
| OSA                         | Online Safety Act 2023  |
| OSCT                        | Office for Security and Counter Terrorism   |
| OWA 1996                    | Offensive Weapons Act 1996  |
| OWA 2019                    | Offensive Weapons Act 2019  |

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| PAF       | Prevent Assessment Framework                                    |
| PAS       | Publicly Available Specification                                |
| PGA       | Prevent Gateway Assessment                                      |
| PCMT      | Prevent Case Management Tracker                                 |
| PCSC Act  | Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022                   |
| PLP       | Police-Led Partnerships   |
| PLR       | Prevent Learning Review   |
| PPE       | Platform Prioritisation Exercise                                |
| PRS       | Prevent Referral Screen   |
| RICU      | Research, Information and Communication Unit of the Home Office |
| SVROs     | Serious Violence Reduction Orders                               |
| TACT 2000 | Terrorism Act 2000  |
| TACT 2006 | Terrorism Act 2006  |
| UKCA      | The UK Central Authority  |
| UKDA      | UK Designated Authority   |
| US / USA  | United States of America  |
| VAF       | Vulnerability Assessment Framework                              |
| VPN       | Virtual Private Network   |
| YDOs      | Youth Diversion Orders  |
| YE        | Year Ending   |
| YEF       | Youth Endowment Fund  |